Frommer's®

# Australia

## from $60 a Day

## 14th Edition

by Marc Llewellyn & Lee Mylne

**Here's what the critics say about Frommer's:**

**"A major publishing challenge for any travel guide is keeping it up to date, and when travelers pick up one on a destination as big as Australia, they want to know that what the writers are giving them is accurate . . . Australian-based writers, including Brisbane-based Lee Mylne, are on the ball."**

*—Courier Mail*

**"Detailed, accurate, and easy-to-read information for all price ranges."**

*—Glamour Magazine*

**"Hotel information is close to encyclopedic."**

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**"Frommer's Guides have a way of giving you a real feel for a place."**

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VISIT…

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## An Invitation to the Reader

In researching this book, we discovered many wonderful places—hotels, restaurants, shops, and more. We're sure you'll find others. Please tell us about them, so we can share the information with your fellow travelers in upcoming editions. If you were disappointed with a recommendation, we'd love to know that, too. Please write to:

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## An Additional Note

Please be advised that travel information is subject to change at any time—and this is especially true of prices. We therefore suggest that you write or call ahead for confirmation when making your travel plans. The authors, editors, and publisher cannot be held responsible for the experiences of readers while traveling. Your safety is important to us, however, so we encourage you to stay alert and be aware of your surroundings. Keep a close eye on cameras, purses, and wallets, all favorite targets of thieves and pickpockets.

## About the Authors

Sydney resident **Marc Llewellyn** is one of Australia's premier travel writers and the winner of several travel writing awards, including the Australian Society of Travel Writer's Travel Writer of the Year award for 2001–02. His latest travelogue, *Riders to the Midnight Sun,* tells of his cycle journey from the Ukrainian Black Sea to arctic Russia in a bid to escape the Australian heat.

**Lee Mylne** writes for a broad range of consumer and travel trade publications around Australia. Born and raised in New Zealand, she has worked in newspapers, magazines, and radio, and she traveled widely before finally figuring out that she could make a living out of it. She has lived in Australia since 1986 and is a Full Member of the Australian Society of Travel Writers. Her books also include *Frommer's Portable Australia's Great Barrier Reef.*


## Other Great Guides for Your Trip:

***Frommer's Australia***
***Frommer's Portable Australia's Great Barrier Reef***
***Frommer's New Zealand***
***Frommer's South Pacific***

## Frommer's Star Ratings, Icons & Abbreviations

Every hotel, restaurant, and attraction listing in this guide has been ranked for quality, value, service, amenities, and special features using a **star-rating system.** In country, state, and regional guides, we also rate towns and regions to help you narrow down your choices and budget your time accordingly. Hotels and restaurants are rated on a scale of zero (recommended) to three stars (exceptional). Attractions, shopping, nightlife, towns, and regions are rated according to the following scale: zero stars (recommended), one star (highly recommended), two stars (very highly recommended), and three stars (must-see).

In addition to the star-rating system, we also use **seven feature icons** that point you to the great deals, in-the-know advice, and unique experiences that separate travelers from tourists. Throughout the book, look for:

| | |
|---|---|
| *Finds* | Special finds—those places only insiders know about |
| *Fun Fact* | Fun facts—details that make travelers more informed and their trips more fun |
| *Kids* | Best bets for kids and advice for the whole family |
| *Moments* | Special moments—those experiences that memories are made of |
| *Overrated* | Places or experiences not worth your time or money |
| *Tips* | Insider tips—great ways to save time and money |
| *Value* | Great values—where to get the best deals |

The following **abbreviations** are used for credit cards:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| AE American Express | DISC Discover | V Visa |
| DC Diners Club | MC MasterCard | |

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- Online travel message boards with featured travel discussions

# What's New in Australia

The land Down Under continues to change in exciting ways. Travelers have new possibilities for getting to and around the country, and a greater choice of things to do once they are here. Here's a brief summary of the latest happenings. You'll find more detail in each of the regional chapters.

**PLANNING YOUR TRIP/GETTING AROUND** The past few years have seen a greater measure of stability over the Australian skies. After the upheavals of the recent past, Australian carriers have settled in to a period of consolidation, with some expansion. All offer good Internet deals.

However, competition is still tough, with no-frills carrier **Virgin Blue** (✆ **13 67 89** in Australia, or 07/3295 2296; www.virginblue.com.au) battling it out with Qantas-owned **Jetstar** (✆ **13 15 38** in Australia, or 03/8341 4901; www.jetstar.com.au). Qantas international subsidiary **Australian Airlines** (✆ **1300/799 798** in Australia, or book through Qantas, 800/227-4500 in the U.S. and Canada) continues to provide an option for visitors from Asia, and an alternative link between Cairns, Sydney, and the Gold Coast.

Virgin offshoot **Pacific Blue** (✆ **13 16 45** in Australia, or 07/3295 2284; www.virginblue.com.au), launched in 2004, now services a growing number of Australian cities from Auckland, Wellington, and Christchurch in New Zealand. It also flies to a few Pacific islands, including Fiji, Vanuatu, and the Cook Islands.

**Regional Express** (✆ **13 17 13** in Australia, or 02/6393 5550; www.regionalexpress.com.au) serves regional New South Wales, South Australia, Victoria, and northern Tasmania.

**SYDNEY** Vibe Hotels has rapidly expanded into Sydney, buying and renovating three hotels: **Vibe Hotel Rushcutters Bay** (✆ **02/8353 8988**) near Kings Cross, **Vibe Hotel Goulburn** (✆ **02/9282 0988**) near Central Station, and **Vibe Hotel North Sydney** (✆ **02/9955 1111**), at Milsons Point. Book online (www.vibehotels.com.au) and find business-class accommodations for as little as A$182 (US$146) a night.

An exciting addition to Sydney Tower is **Skytour** (✆ **02/9223 0933**), a series of interactive exhibits where you can listen to Australian yarns, watch moving models and holograms of Australian landscapes, visit a reconstruction of an Aboriginal cave, and in a big-screen simulator, go white-water rafting in Queensland, climb Uluru (Ayers Rock), and have a close encounter with a crocodile.

Another major attraction to debut is **SkyWalk** (✆ **02/9333 9222;** www.skywalk.com.au), which allows adventurers to walk on Sydney Tower's roof, 268m (879 ft.) above ground level.

**BRISBANE** Thanks to **Story Bridge Adventure Climb** (✆ **07/3514 6900;** www.storybridgeadventureclimb.com.au), visitors can climb the Story Bridge to a 44m-high (144-ft.) viewing platform overlooking the city, the river, and the Moreton Bay.

### Tips Butt Out Down Under . . .

Smokers traveling to Australia will find greater restrictions on the number of places they can light up. Smoking is banned or heavily restricted in most public places, such as restaurants, museums, cinemas, theaters, and airport terminals. Starting in early 2006, a total ban on smoking will apply to pubs and clubs in Tasmania, followed by Queensland and Western Australian in July 2006. Victoria and New South Wales will go the same way in 2007.

**QUEENSLAND** Great Keppel Island's popular resort has returned to what it has always done best: family holidays. Rebranded as **Mercure Resort Great Keppel Island** (✆ **1800/245 658** in Australia, or 07/4939 5044; www.greatkeppelresort.com.au), it has been completely refurbished and now has family-friendly features such as a kids' club.

Visitors to Bundaberg's **Mon Repos Conservation Park** (✆ **07/4159 1652** for the visitor center), one of the two largest loggerhead-turtle rookeries in the South Pacific, will find waiting for their turn to watch turtles nesting (Nov–Mar) much less daunting after the introduction of a new booking system for turtle-watching tours. Access to the beach is by ticket only.

In the Outback mining town of Mt. Isa, a new A$12-million (US$9.6-million) tourism complex is the only place in Queensland where you can go underground on a full-guided mine tour. **Outback at Isa,** 19 Marian St. (✆ **1300/659 660** in Australia, or 07/4749 1555; www.outbackatisa.com.au) also includes Outback Park, a cool oasis, with a lagoon, lush vegetation and waterfalls, performances at an amphitheatre, and the experience of eating dinner in the Underground Mine Crib Room.

**PERTH & WESTERN AUSTRALIA** Guests at **Emma Gorge Resort,** part of the El Questro Wilderness Park (✆ **1300/656 565** in Australia, or 08/9169 1777; www.elquestro.com.au), can now stay in 10 "tented cabins" that were added to the existing oasis of permanent tents at the foot of the soaring red Cockburn Range. The tents have polished wooden floors, electric lights, fans, insect screens, firm beds with goose-feather pillows, Indian cotton sheets and quilts, and flashlights for getting around at night.

**Monkey Mia Dolphin Resort,** Monkey Mia Road, Shark Bay (✆ **1800/653 611** in Australia, or 08/9948 1320; www.monkeymia.com.au) opened its beachside Dolphin Lodge and backpacker lodge in 2004. The 24 motel-style beachside units at the front of the Dolphin Lodge offer a more upmarket option than was previously available. Each has a king-size bed, private bathroom, and hair dryer. Ground-floor units open right onto the dolphin beach, and first-floor units have balconies. The backpacker lodge, with its bar and large communal kitchen, has four- and seven-bed dormitories as well as shared and family rooms with bathrooms.

**VICTORIA** One of Australia's most recognizable landmarks was altered forever in July 2005 with the collapse of one of the largest of the Twelve Apostles rock formations. The rock stack, which stood out to sea, along with others in the group, crumbled in seconds thanks to natural fissures in the limestone.

# 1

# The Best of Australia

*by Marc Llewellyn & Lee Mylne*

Maybe we're biased because we live here, but Australia has a lot of bests—world bests, that is. It has some of the best natural scenery, the weirdest wildlife, the most brilliant scuba diving and snorkeling, the best beaches (shut up, California), the oldest rainforest (110 million years and counting), the oldest human civilization (some archaeologists say 40,000 years, some say 120,000; whatever—it's old), the best wines (come see what we mean), the best weather (give or take the odd Wet season in the north), the most innovative East-meets-West-meets-someplace-else cuisine—all bathed in sunlight that brings everything up in Technicolor.

"Best" means different things to different people, but scarcely a visitor lands on these shores without having the Great Barrier Reef at the top of the "Things to See" list. So they should, because it really is a glorious natural masterpiece. Also high on most folks' lists is Ayers Rock. This monolith must have some kind of magnet inside it designed to attract planeloads of tourists. We're not saying the Rock isn't special, but we think the vast Australian desert all around it is even more so. The third attraction on most visitors' lists is Sydney, the Emerald City that glitters in the antipodean sunshine on—here we go with the "bests" again—the best harbor, spanned by the best bridge in the world (yes it is, San Francisco).

But as planes zoom overhead delivering visitors to the big three attractions, Aussies in charming country towns, on far-flung beaches, on rustic sheep stations, in rainforest villages, and in mountain lodges shake their heads and say sadly, "They don't know what they're missin'." Well, that's the aim of this chapter—to show you what you're missin'. Read on, and consider taking the road less traveled.

## 1 The Top Travel Experiences

- **Hitting the Rails on the *Indian Pacific* Train:** This 3-day journey across the Outback regularly makes it onto travel magazines' "Top Rail Journeys in the World" lists. The desert scenery ain't all that magnificent—it's the unspoiled, empty vastness that passengers appreciate. Start in Sydney and end in Perth, or vice versa, or just do a section. Alternatively, you could take the *Ghan,* for a multiday trip from Adelaide in the south all the way up to Darwin in the north. See "Getting Around Australia" in chapter 2.
- **Experiencing Sydney** (NSW): Sydney is more than just the magnificent Harbour Bridge and Opera House. No other city has beaches in such abundance, and few have such a magnificently scenic harbor. Our advice is to board a ferry, walk from one side of the bridge to the other, and try to spend a week here because you're going to need it. See chapter 4, "Sydney."

### Tips A Note on Abbreviations

In the listings below, NSW stands for New South Wales, QLD for Queensland, NT for the Northern Territory, WA for Western Australia, SA for South Australia, VIC for Victoria, TAS for Tasmania, and ACT for the Australian Capital Territory.

- **Discovering the Great Barrier Reef** (QLD): It is hard to believe God would create such a glorious underwater fairyland, a 2,000km (1,250-mile) coral garden with electric colors and bizarre fish life, *and* have the grace to stick it all somewhere with warm water and year-round sunshine. This is what you came to Australia to see. See chapter 7.
- **Exploring the Wet Tropics** (QLD): City folk can't get over the moisture-dripping ferns, the neon blue butterflies, or the primeval peace of this World Heritage patch of rainforest stretching north, south, and west from Cairns. Hike it, 4WD it, or glide over the treetops in the Skyrail gondola from Cairns. See chapter 7.
- **Bareboat Sailing in the Whitsundays** (QLD): Bareboat means unskippered—that's right, even if you think port is just an after-dinner drink, you can charter a yacht, pay for a day's instruction from a skipper, then take over the helm and explore these 74 island gems. Anchor in deserted bays, snorkel over reefs, fish for coral trout from the deck, and feel the wind in your sails. See p. 319.
- **Exploring Kata Tjuta (the Olgas) & Uluru (Ayers Rock)** (NT): Just why everyone comes thousands of miles to see the big red stone of Ayers Rock is a mystery, and that's probably why they come—because the Rock is a mystery. Just 50km (31 miles) from Ayers Rock are the round red heads of the Olgas, a second rock formation more significant to Aborigines and more intriguing to many visitors. See "Uluru–Kata Tjuta National Park (Ayers Rock/The Olgas)" in chapter 8.
- **Taking an Aboriginal Culture Tour** (Alice Springs, NT): Eating female wasps, contemplating a hill as a giant resting caterpillar, and imagining that the stars are your grandmother smiling down at you will give you a new perspective on Aboriginal culture. See what we mean on a half-day tour from the Aboriginal Art & Culture Centre. See p. 387.
- **Exploring Kakadu National Park** (NT): Australia's biggest national park is a wild wonderland of lily-clad wetlands, looming red escarpment, Aboriginal rock art, fern-fringed waterholes, countless birds, big barramundi (that's a fish), and menacing crocs. Cruise it, hike it, 4WD it, fish it. See "Kakadu National Park" in chapter 9.
- **Cruising the Kimberley** (WA): Australia's last frontier, the Kimberley is a cocktail of giant South Sea pearls, red soil, crocodiles, Aboriginal rock art called *Wandjina,* and million-acre farms in a never-ending wilderness. Cross it by 4WD on the Gibb River Road, stay at a cattle station (ranch), base yourself on the beach in Broome, or cruise its dramatic red coastline. See chapter 10.
- **Rolling in Wildflowers** (WA): Imagine Texas three times over and covered in wildflowers. That's what the state of Western Australia looks like every spring from August to mid-November when pink, mauve, red, white, yellow, and blue wildflowers bloom their hearts out. See chapter 10.

- **Drinking in the Barossa Valley** (SA): One of Australia's four largest wine-producing areas, this German-speaking region less than an hour's drive from Adelaide is also the prettiest. Adelaide's restaurants happen to be some of the country's best, too, so test out your wine purchases with the city's terrific food. See "Side Trips from Adelaide" in chapter 11.
- **Getting Dusty in the Desert** (SA): Head inland from Adelaide to the Outback to visit remote pubs and settlements, the craggy ridges of the Flinders Ranges, dry salt lakes, and deserts. See "Outback South Australia" in chapter 11.
- **Seeing the Sights Along the Great Ocean Road** (VIC): This 106km (66-mile) coastal road carries you past wild and stunning beaches, forests, and dramatic cliff-top scenery—including the Twelve Apostles, a dozen pillars of red rock standing in isolation in the foaming Southern Ocean. (Actually there are now just eleven apostles as one collapsed in July 2005.) See "The Great Ocean Road: One of the World's Most Scenic Drives" in chapter 13.

## 2 The Best Outdoor Adventures

- **Horse Trekking in the Snowy Mountains** (NSW): Ride the ranges like the man from Snowy River, staying in bush lodges or camping beneath the stars. See "In the Footsteps of the Man from Snowy River," p. 216, in chapter 5.
- **Abseiling (Rappelling) in the Blue Mountains** (NSW): Careering backward down a cliff face with the smell of eucalyptus in your nostrils is not everyone's idea of fun, but you sure know you're alive. Several operators welcome both novices and the more experienced. See "The Blue Mountains" in chapter 5.
- **White-Water Rafting on the Tully River** (Mission Beach, QLD): The Class III to IV rapids of the Tully River swoosh between lush, rainforested banks. The guides are professional, the scenery is pretty, and the rapids are just hair-raising enough to be fun. See p. 292.
- **Canoeing the Top End** (NT): Paddling down the sun-drenched ocher walls of Katherine Gorge sharpens the senses, especially when a freshwater crocodile pops its head up! Head downriver with Gecko Canoeing to meet Aboriginal communities, shower under waterfalls, and camp in swags along the riverbanks. See "Exploring Katherine Gorge (Nitmiluk National Park)" on p. 426.
- **Surfing in Margaret River** (WA): A surfing lesson with four-time Western Australia champ Josh Palmateer is a great introduction to the sport—if only to hear Josh's ripper of an Aussie accent! From July to September, Josh shifts his classes to Cable Beach in Broome. See p. 468.
- **Sea Kayaking with Sea Lions** (WA): Snorkel with sea lions and watch penguins feeding on a sea-kayaking day trip from Perth with Rivergods. They also run multiday sea-kayak expeditions past whales, dolphins, and sharks in Shark Bay, and over the brilliant coral of Ningaloo Reef on the Northwest Cape in Western Australia. See p. 452.
- **Skiing in the Victorian Alps** (VIC): Skiing in Australia? Sure. When you've had enough coral and sand, you can hit the slopes in Victoria. Where else can you swish down the mountain between gum trees—apart from more ski slopes in New South Wales that is? See "The High Country" in chapter 13.

## 3 The Best Places to View Wildlife

- **Jervis Bay** (NSW): This is probably the closest place to Sydney where you're certain to see kangaroos in the wild—and where you can pet them, too. The national park here is home to hundreds of bird species, including black cockatoos, as well as plenty of possums. See "South of Sydney Along the Princes Highway" in chapter 5.
- **Pebbly Beach** (NSW): The eastern gray kangaroos that inhabit Murramarang National Park, 20 minutes south of Ulladulla on the south coast of New South Wales, tend to congregate along this beach and the adjoining dunes. See "South of Sydney Along the Princes Highway" in chapter 5.
- **Montague Island** (Narooma, NSW): This little island just offshore from the seaside town of Narooma, on the south coast, is a haven for nesting seabirds, but the water around it is home to the main attractions. Dolphins are common; fairy penguins, too. In whale-watching season, you're sure to spot southern right and humpback whales. See "South of Sydney Along the Princes Highway" in chapter 5.
- **Lone Pine Koala Sanctuary** (Brisbane, QLD): Cuddle a koala (and have your photo taken doing it) at this Brisbane park, the world's first and largest koala sanctuary. Lots of other Aussie wildlife—including lizards, frogs, 'roos, wallabies (which you can hand-feed), and colorful parakeets—are on show. See p. 240.
- **Australian Butterfly Sanctuary** (Kuranda, near Cairns, QLD): Walk through the biggest butterfly "aviary" in Australia and see some of Australia's most gorgeous butterflies, including the electric-blue Ulysses. See many species of butterfly feed, lay eggs, and mate, and inspect caterpillars and pupae. Wearing pink, red, or white encourages the butterflies to land on you. See p. 290.
- **Daintree and Cape Tribulation national parks** (Cairns, QLD): Head into the Wet Tropics behind Cairns or Port Douglas with eco-tour operator Wait-a-while Rainforest Tours to spotlight big-eyed possums, lizards, pythons, the bizarre bats—even platypuses, which are so shy that 95% of Aussies have never seen one in the wild. About once a month on average, one lucky group will spot the rare and bizarre Lumholtz's tree kangaroo. See p. 300.
- **Heron Island** (off Gladstone, QLD): There's wonderful wildlife on this "jewel in the reef" any time of year, but the best time to visit is November to March, when the life cycle of giant green loggerhead and hawksbill turtles is in full swing. From November to January, the turtles come ashore to lay their eggs. From late January to March, the hatchlings emerge and head for the water. You can see it all by just strolling down to the beach, or you can join a university researcher to get the full story. See p. 335.
- **Currumbin Wildlife Sanctuary** (The Gold Coast, QLD): Tens of thousands of unbelievably pretty red, blue, green, and yellow rainbow lorikeets have been screeching into this park for generations to be hand-fed by visitors every morning and afternoon. There are 'roos, wombats, crocodiles, and other Australian animals at the sanctuary, too, but the birds steal the show. See p. 360.
- **Lamington National Park** (The Gold Coast Hinterland, QLD): Every day, brilliant black-and-gold Regent bowerbirds, satin bowerbirds, crimson-and-cobalt rosellas, and

loads of other wild birds feed right out of your hand at O'Reilly's Rainforest Guesthouse, located in this mountainous national park a 90-minute drive inland from the Gold Coast. Hike the trails and soak up the cool mountain air while you're here. See "The Gold Coast Hinterland: Back to Nature" in chapter 7.

- **Monkey Mia** (WA): There are several places you can see, hand-feed, or swim with wild dolphins Down Under. If you want an almost guaranteed dolphin sighting, head to Monkey Mia on the lonely Outback coast, where the animals cruise past your legs. Even better is a cruise on the *Shotover* catamaran to see some of the area's 10,000 dugongs, plus turtles, sea snakes, sharks—and more. See "The Midwest & the Northwest: Where the Outback Meets the Sea" in chapter 10.
- **Kakadu National Park** (NT): One-third of Australia's bird species live in Kakadu; so do dingoes, snakes, frogs, and lots of dangerous saltwater crocs. A cruise on the Yellow Waters billabong is like a wetlands theme park. It is at its best later in the Dry season around September and October, when wildlife converges around this shrinking water source. See p. 416.
- **Northwest Cape** (WA): Go snorkeling with a whale shark. No one knows where they come from, but these mysterious monsters up to 18m (60 ft.) long surface in these remote waters every March to mid-June. Snorkelers can swim alongside the sharks as they feed (on plankton, not snorkelers). See p. 478.
- **Kangaroo Island** (SA): You're sure to see more native animals here—including koalas, wallabies, birds, echidnas, reptiles, seals, and sea lions—than anywhere else in the country, apart from a wildlife park. Another plus: The distances between major points of interest are not great, so you won't spend half the day just getting from place to place. See "Kangaroo Island" in chapter 11.

## 4 The Best Places to Experience the Outback

- **Broken Hill** (NSW): There's no better place to experience real Outback life than in Broken Hill. There's the city itself, with its thriving art scene and the Royal Flying Doctor service; a historic ghost town on its outskirts; a national park with Aboriginal wall paintings; an opal mining town nearby; and plenty of kangaroos, emus, and giant wedge-tailed eagles. See "Outback New South Wales" in chapter 5.
- **Lightning Ridge** (NSW): This opal-mining town is as rough and ready as the stones the miners pull out of the ground. Meet amazing characters, share in the eccentricity of the place, and visit opal-rush areas with molehill scenery made by the old sun-bleached mine tailings. See "Outback New South Wales" in chapter 5.
- **Uluru–Kata Tjuta National Park** (Ayers Rock, NT): Sure, Ayers Rock will enthrall you with its eerie beauty, but the nearby Olgas are more soothing, more interesting, and taller than the Rock, so make the time to wander through them, too. Hike the Rock's base, burn around it on a Harley-Davidson, saunter up to it on a camel, climb it if you must. Don't go home until you've felt the powerful heartbeat of the desert. See "Uluru–Kata Tjuta National Park (Ayers Rock/The Olgas)" in chapter 8.
- **The MacDonnell Ranges** (NT): The Aborigines say these red rocky hills were formed by the Aboriginal

"Caterpillar Dreaming" that wriggled from the earth here. To the west of Alice Springs are dramatic gorges, idyllic (and bloody cold) water holes, and cute wallabies. To the east are Aboriginal rock carvings. See "Road Trips from Alice Springs" in chapter 8.

- **Kings Canyon** (NT): Anyone who saw the cult flick *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* will remember the scene in which the transvestites climb a soaring orange cliff and survey the desert floor. That was Kings Canyon, about 320km (198 miles) from Alice Springs in one direction, with Ayers Rock in the other. Trek the dramatic rim or take the easier shady route along the bottom. Don't forget your lipstick, guys. See "Kings Canyon" in chapter 8.
- **Coober Pedy** (SA): It may be hot and dusty, but you'll get a true taste of the Outback when you tag along with the local mail carrier as he makes his rounds to the area's remote cattle stations (ranches). It's a 12-hour, 600km (372-mile) journey along sun-baked dirt roads. See "Outback South Australia" in chapter 11.

## 5 The Best Beaches

- **Palm Beach** (Sydney): At the end of a string of beaches stretching north from Sydney, Palm Beach is long and white, with good surfing and a golf course. See chapter 4, "Sydney."
- **Hyams Beach** (Jervis Bay, NSW): This beach in off-the-beaten-path Jervis Bay is said to be the whitest in the world. You need to wear sunblock if you decide to stroll along it because the reflection from the sun, even on a cloudy day, can give you a nasty sunburn. The beach squeaks as you walk. See "South of Sydney Along the Princes Highway" in chapter 5.
- **Four Mile Beach** (Port Douglas, QLD): The sea is turquoise, the sun is warm, the palms sway, and the low-rise hotels starting to line this country beach can't spoil the feeling that it is a million miles from anywhere. But isn't there always a serpent in paradise? The "serpent" in this case is north Queensland's seasonal—and potentially deadly—marine stingers. Come from June to September to avoid them, or swim in the stinger net. See "Port Douglas, Daintree & the Cape Tribulation Area" in chapter 7.
- **Mission Beach** (QLD): Azure blue sea, islands dotting the horizon, and lush white sand edged by dense tangled vine forests make this beach a real winner. So does the fact that hardly anyone ever comes here. Cassowaries (giant emulike birds) hide out in the rainforest, and the tiny town of Mission Beach politely makes itself invisible behind the leaves. Visit from June to September to avoid deadly marine stingers. See "The North Coast: Mission Beach, Townsville & the Islands" in chapter 7.
- **Whitehaven Beach** (The Whitsunday Islands, QLD): It's not a surf beach, but this 6km (¾-mile) stretch of silica sand on Whitsunday Island is pristine, peaceful, and as white as snow. Bring a book, curl up under the rainforest lining its edge, and fantasize that the cruise boat is going to leave without you. See "The Whitsunday Coast & Islands" in chapter 7.
- **Main Beach, Noosa** (Sunshine Coast, QLD): The trendy shops of Hastings Street line the white sand and gently rolling surf of this pretty beach. Dust off your designer swimsuit for this one. When you get tired of the scene, you can hike the green walking trails of nearby Noosa

National Park. See "The Sunshine Coast" in chapter 7.

- **Surfers Paradise** (Gold Coast, QLD): All the beaches on the 30km (19-mile) Gold Coast strip in south Queensland are worthy of inclusion. Every one of them has clean sand, great surf, and fresh breezes. Just ignore the tacky high-rises behind you. Surfers will like Kirra and Burleigh Heads. See "The Gold Coast" in chapter 7.
- **Cable Beach** (Broome, WA): Is it the South Sea pearls they pull out of the Indian Ocean, the camels loping along the sand at sunset, the surf, or the red earth that comes down to meet the green water that gives this beach its exotic appeal? Maybe it's the 22km (14 miles) of glorious white sand. June to September is the only time to swim here because of deadly marine stingers. See "The Kimberley: A Far-Flung Wilderness" in chapter 10.

## 6 The Best Affordable Diving & Snorkeling Sites

- ***Yongala* wreck** (Off Townsville, QLD): Sunk by a cyclone in 1911, the 120m (394-ft.) SS *Yongala* lies in the Coral Sea off Townsville. Big schools of *trevally,* kingfish, barracuda, and batfish surround the wreckage; giant Queensland grouper live under the bow, lionfish hide under the stern, turtles graze on the hull, and hard and soft corals make their home on her. Extended liveaboard dive trips run from Townsville and Cairns. See p. 272.
- **Green Island** (QLD): This island is made of coral, so you'd expect the snorkeling to be good. Plunge off the beach just about anywhere around the island and marvel at the scenes before you. Come over for the day from Cairns or stay at the island's upscale resort. Scuba divers will like it here, too. See p. 288.
- **Port Douglas** (QLD): Many fabulous dive sites can be found off the shores of Port Douglas, north of Cairns, including Split-Bommie, with its delicate fan corals and schools of colorful fusiliers; Barracuda Pass, with its coral gardens and giant clams; the swim-through coral spires of the Cathedrals; and numerous ribbon reefs renowned for their variety of coral and fish life. See p. 294.
- **Cairns** (QLD): In addition to Green Island (see above), Moore, Norman, Hardy, Saxon, and Arlington reefs and Michaelmas and Upolu cays—all about 90 minutes off Cairns—offer great snorkeling and endless dive sites. Explore on a day trip from Cairns or on a 3-day sailing adventure. See p. 274.
- **The Whitsunday Islands** (QLD): These 74 breathtaking islands offer countless dive sites among the islands themselves and on the Outer Great Barrier Reef 90 minutes away. Bait Reef on the Outer Reef is popular for its cascading drop-offs. The underwater life is as varied and stunning here as anywhere else along the Great Barrier Reef, and when you're not diving or snorkeling, the above-the-water landscape is a beautiful playground. See "The Whitsunday Coast & Islands" in chapter 7.
- **Rottnest Island** (WA): Just 19km (12 miles) off Perth, excellent snorkeling and more than 100 dive sites await you in the sheltered bays of this former prison island. Wrecks, limestone overhangs, and myriad fish will keep you entertained. There are no cars on the island, so rent a bike and snorkel gear, grab a map of snorkel trails, and find your own private coral

garden. See "Side Trips from Perth" in chapter 10.

- **Ningaloo Reef** (WA): A stunningly well-kept secret is how we'd describe Australia's second great barrier reef stretching some 260km (163 miles) along the Northwest Cape halfway up Western Australia. Dazzling coral starts right on shore, not 90 minutes out to sea like at the Great Barrier Reef. You can snorkel or dive with manta rays and dive to see sharks, angelfish, turtles, eels, grouper, potato cod, and much more. See "The Midwest & the Northwest: Where the Outback Meets the Sea" in chapter 10.

## 7 The Best Places to Bushwalk (Hike)

- **Blue Mountains** (NSW): Many bushwalks in the Blue Mountains National Park offer awesome views of valleys, waterfalls, cliffs, and forest. All are easy to reach from Sydney. See "The Blue Mountains" in chapter 5.
- **Whitsunday Islands** (QLD): Most people think of snorkeling and water sports when they come to these 74 tropical islands clad in dense rainforest and bush, but every resort island we recommend in chapter 7 also has hiking trails. Some are flat, some are hilly. Wallabies and butterflies are common sights en route. South Molle has the best network of trails and 360-degree island views from its peak. The Whitsundays Great Walk—one of six Great Walks of Queensland—covers 36km (22 miles) in Conway State Forest and Conway National Park, behind Airlie Beach. See "The Whitsunday Coast & Islands" in chapter 7.
- **Lamington National Park** (Gold Coast Hinterland, QLD): Few other national parks in Australia have such a well-marked network of trails as this one—160km (100 miles) of them, all up. Revel in dense subtropical rainforest, marvel at mossy 2,000-year-old Antarctic beech trees, watch for blue and white Lamington Spiny Crayfish in the streams, and soak up the cool mountain air 900m (3,000 ft.) above sea level. See p. 363.
- **Larapinta Trail** (The Red Centre, NT): You can start from Alice Springs and walk the entire 250km (155-mile) semidesert trail, which winds through the stark crimson MacDonnell Ranges. You don't have to walk the entire length—plenty of day-length and multiday sections are possible. This one's for the cooler months only (Apr–Oct). See "Alice Springs" in chapter 8.
- **Kakadu National Park** (NT): Whether you want a pleasant wetlands stroll or a tough overnight hike, you can find it in this World Heritage–listed park. Hike past red cliffs, cycads straight from a dinosaur movie set, lily-filled lagoons hiding human-eating crocodiles, and what looks like Australia's entire bird population. There's some good Aboriginal rock art here, too. See "Kakadu National Park" in chapter 9.
- **Cape-to-Cape** (WA): Rugged sea cliffs, china blue sea, eucalyptus forest, white beaches, and coastal heath are what you will experience hiking between Cape Naturaliste and Cape Leeuwin, in the southwest corner of Western Australia. Walk a short section or tackle the whole 6-day extravaganza. In season you will see whales and wildflowers. See p. 463.
- **Freycinet National Park** (TAS): The trek to Wine Glass Bay passes pink granite outcrops, with views over an

ocean sliced by a crescent of icy sand. It's prehistorically beautiful. See "Freycinet National Park" in chapter 15.

- **Cradle Mountain and Lake St. Clair National Park** (TAS): The 80km (50-mile) Overland Track is the best hike in Australia. The trek, from Lake St. Clair to Cradle Mountain, takes 5 to 10 days, depending on your fitness level. Shorter walks, some lasting just half an hour, are also accessible. See "Cradle Mountain & Lake St. Clair National Park" in chapter 15.

## 8 The Best Places to Learn About Aboriginal Culture

- **The Umbarra Aboriginal Cultural Centre** (Wallaga Lake, near Narooma, NSW): This center offers boomerang- and spear-throwing instruction, painting with natural ochers, discussions on Aboriginal culture, and guided walking tours of Aboriginal sacred sites. See p. 213.
- **Tjapukai Aboriginal Cultural Park** (Cairns, QLD): This multimillion-dollar center showcases the history of the local Tjapukai people—their Dreamtime creation history and their often harrowing experiences since the white man arrived—using a film, a superb theatrical work, and a dance performance. Its Aboriginal arts and crafts gift shop is one of the country's best. See p. 285.
- **Native Guide Safari Tours** (Port Douglas, QLD): Hazel Douglas, an Aborigine who was brought up in the 110-million-year-old rainforest of the Daintree and Cape Tribulation area, takes you on a full-day 4WD safari to explain Aboriginal legends, point out what different plants are used for, and teach you stuff like how to know when a crocodile is in the water. See p. 302.
- **Aboriginal Art & Culture Centre** (Alice Springs, NT): You'll taste bush food, see a dance, throw boomerangs and spears, and learn about Aboriginal family values in one half-day tour of this Aborigine-owned center in Alice Springs. Be sure to hang around for the 1-hour didgeridoo lesson at the end. See p. 385.
- **Anangu Tours** (Ayers Rock, NT): The Anangu are the owners of Ayers Rock or, in their native tongue, Uluru. Join them for walks around the Rock as you learn about the poisonous "snake men" who fought battles here, pick bush food off the trees, throw spears, visit rock paintings, and watch the sun set over the monolith. Their Cultural Centre near the base of the Rock has displays about the Aboriginal Dreamtime. See p. 397.
- **Mangarrayi People** (Katherine, NT): Mike Keighley of **Far Out Adventures** (✆ **02/6557 6076** or 04/2715 2288) takes tours to the beautiful Elsey Station where you get to visit with the children of the local Mangarrayi people. You'll get to sample bush tucker, learn a little bush medicine, and swim in a vine-clad natural "spa-pool" in the Roper River. See p. 428.
- **Yamatji Bitja Aboriginal Bush Tours** (Kalgoorlie, WA): Geoffrey Stokes, who was brought up living a traditional Aboriginal life out in the bush near Kalgoorlie, takes you out tracking animals, foraging for bush food, and even hunting a 'roo for dinner (with a gun, not a boomerang!). Explore the bush, learn about creation myths, and find out what his childhood was like. See p. 471.
- **Tandanya Aboriginal Cultural Institute** (Adelaide, SA): This is a

great place to experience life through Aboriginal eyes. You might catch one of the dances or other performances, and you'll have plenty of other opportunities to find out more about Aboriginal culture. See p. 507.

## 9 The Best of Small-Town Australia

- **Central Tilba** (NSW): Just inland from Narooma on the south coast, this historic hamlet is one of the cutest you'll see, complete with blacksmiths and leatherwork outlets. The ABC Cheese Factory offers free tastings, and you can spend hours browsing antiques stalls or admiring the period buildings. See p. 213.
- **Broken Hill** (NSW): Known for its silver mines, the quirky town of Broken Hill has more pubs per capita than just about anywhere else. It's the home of the School of the Air—a "classroom" that transmits lessons by radio to communities spread over thousands of miles of Outback. Here you'll also find the Palace Hotel, made famous in *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert,* as well as plenty of colonial mansions and heritage homes. See p. 218.
- **Mission Beach** (QLD): You'd never know this tidy village, hidden in lush rainforest off the highway, existed if you weren't a well-informed traveler. Aussies know it's here, but few of them bother to patronize its dazzling beach, cute restaurants, and secluded trails, so you'll have the place all to yourself. There's great white-water rafting on the nearby Tully River, too. See p. 303.
- **Broome** (WA): This romantic pearling port on the far-flung Kimberley coast on the Indian Ocean blends Australian corrugated-iron architecture with red pagoda roofs left by the Chinese pearl divers who settled here. The town combines a sophisticated international ambience with a rough Outback attitude. Beautiful Cable Beach (see "The Best Beaches," above) is just outside town. This is the place to add to your South Sea pearl collection. See p. 488.
- **Kalgoorlie** (WA): Vibrant Kalgoorlie sits on what used to be the richest square mile of gold-bearing earth ever. Have a drink in one of the 19th-century pubs (especially at night when the miners come on shift), peer into the open-cut gold mine (the world's biggest), descend an old-fashioned mine shaft and pan for riches, and wander the ghost town streets of Coolgardie. See "The Goldfields" in chapter 10.
- **Hahndorf** (SA): A group of Lutheran settlers founded this German-style town in the Adelaide Hills in the 1830s. You'll love the churches, the wool factory and crafts shops, and the delicious German food at the local cafes, restaurants, and bakeries. See p. 516.
- **Coober Pedy** (SA): For an Outback experience that's *fair-dinkum* (genuine), few places are as weird and wonderful as this opal-mining town in the middle of nowhere. Visit mines, see wacky museums, and stay in a hotel underground—not all that unusual, considering that the locals live like moles anyway. See p. 528.
- **Launceston** (TAS): Tasmania's second city is not much larger than your average European or American small town, but it's packed with Victorian and Georgian architecture and remnants of Australia's convict past. Spend a few days and discover the scenery; splurge a little on a stay in a historic hotel. See p. 628.

## 10 The Best Museums

- **Australian National Maritime Museum** (Sydney, NSW): The best things about this museum are the ships and submarines often docked in the harbor out front. You can climb aboard and experience what it's like to be a sailor. Inside are some fascinating displays relating to Australia's dependence on the oceans. See p. 146.
- **Alice Springs Telegraph Station Historical Reserve** (NT): It's not called a museum, but that's what this restored telegraph-repeater station out in the picturesque hills by a spring—Alice Springs—really is. From the hot biscuits turned out of the wood-fired oven to the old telegraph equipment, this 1870s settlement is as real as history can get. See p. 386.
- **Australian Aviation Heritage Centre** (Darwin, NT): The pride of this hangar is a B-52 bomber on permanent loan from the U.S. But there's loads more, not just planes, engines, and aviation paraphernalia, but detailed stories, jokes, and anecdotes associated with the exhibits—put together by enthusiastic members of the Aviation Historical Society of the Northern Territory. See p. 413.
- **Warradjan Aboriginal Cultural Centre** (Kakadu National Park, NT): This circular building was built in the shape of a pig-nose turtle at the direction of the Aboriginal owners. Exhibits about the bush tucker, Dreamtime creation myths, and lifestyles of the local Bininj Aboriginal people are on display. See p. 422.
- **Western Australian Museum** (Perth, WA): Skip the natural history displays and head straight to the country's best display of Aboriginal culture. Evocative photographs, artifacts, and display boards paint a sad and thoughtful portrait of Australia before and after the arrival of Europeans. See p. 448.
- **Western Australian Maritime Museum** (Perth, WA): Housed in a brand new building in the historic port precinct of Fremantle, Perth, this museum tells tales of the harsh Western Australian coastline since the Dutch first bumped into it and abandoned it as useless in the 1600s. You can also tour HMAS *Ovens,* an Oberon-class submarine. See p. 451.
- **York Motor Museum** (York, WA): This multimillion-dollar collection of veteran, vintage, classic, and racing cars is one of the most wide-ranging in the country. If you're a car buff, head for the historic town of York and make a day of it. See p. 461.
- **The Migration Museum** (Adelaide, SA): This museum gives visitors insight into the people who came to Australia, how and where they settled, and how many suffered getting here. Don't expect a lot of musty displays—this museum is full of hands-on activities. See p. 506.
- **Australian War Memorial** (Canberra, ACT): Given its name, you might think this museum is a bleak place, but you'd be wrong. It gives important insight into the Anzac (Australian and New Zealand Army Corps) spirit, including an exhibit on the tragic battle of Gallipoli. There's also a pretty good art collection. See p. 605.
- **National Museum of Australia** (ACT): Using state-of-the-art technology and hands-on exhibits, Australia's newest and most impressive museum concentrates on Australian society and its history since 1788, the interaction of people with the Australian environment, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and histories. See p. 606.

## 11 The Best Moderately Priced Accommodations

- **Explorers Inn Hotel** (✆ **1800/623 288** in Australia, or 07/3211 3488) and **Hotel George Williams** (✆ **1800/064 858** in Australia, or 07/3308 0700), both in Brisbane, QLD: These two hotels around the corner from each other in Brizzie are shining examples of what cheap hotels should be—trendy, clean, and bright with useful facilities like electronic keys, and an inexpensive restaurant. See p. 234.
- **Archipelago Studio Apartments** (Port Douglas, QLD; ✆ **07/4099 5387**): They may be tiny, but these pretty apartments have a homey atmosphere and are just seconds from spectacular Four Mile Beach. Some units have sea views. The solicitous proprietor is a mine of advice on things to see and do. See p. 296.
- **Miss Maud Swedish Hotel** (Perth, WA; ✆ **1800/998 022** in Australia, or 08/9325 3900): Staying here, in the heart of Perth, is like staying at grandma's—even if your grandma's house doesn't have a somewhat Swedish flavor. Friendly staff members who actually look pleased to see you and great food complete the picture. See p. 441.
- **North Adelaide Heritage Group** (Adelaide, SA; ✆ **08/8272 1355**): These accommodations consist of 18 fabulous properties in North Adelaide and Eastwood. The former Friendly Meeting Chapel Hall resembles a small church stocked with Victorian antiques. Another memorable place is the George Lowe Esq. Apartment, done in the style of a 19th-century gentleman's bachelor pad. See p. 503.

## 12 The Best Alternative Accommodations

- **Underground Motel** (White Cliffs, NSW; ✆ **1800/021 154** in Australia, or 08/8091 6677): All but two of this motel's rooms are underground. Rooms are reached by a maze of spacious tunnels dug out of the rock beneath this opal-mining town. See p. 219.
- **South Long Island Nature Lodge** (The Whitsunday Islands, QLD; ✆ **07/4946 9777**): The five beachfront cabins are basic, but your vacation at this island retreat will be anything but. Activities include sea kayaking, sailing, snorkeling, hiking trails, dining outside under the Milky Way, and swimming with Myrtle, the pet kangaroo. Considering you won't put your hand in your wallet except for wine and maybe a seaplane trip to the Reef, this is a great value. See p. 325.
- **Binna Burra Mountain Lodge** (✆ **1800/074 260** in Australia, or 07/5533 3622) and **O'Reilly's Rainforest Guesthouse** (✆ **1800/688 722** in Australia, or 07/5544 0644), both in the Gold Coast Hinterland, QLD: Tucked snugly almost 1,000m (3,280 ft.) up on rainforested ridges behind the Gold Coast, these retreats offer fresh mountain air and instant access to Lamington National Park. At O'Reilly's you can hand-feed brilliantly colored birds every morning. See p. 366 and 367.
- **Emma Gorge Resort** (The Kimberley, WA; ✆ **08/9169 1777**): At this spick-and-span settlement on the million-acre El Questro cattle station, guests stay in safari tents with wooden floors and electric lights; eat at a rustic gourmet restaurant; and join in hikes, bird-watching tours, river cruises, and more. A hike up

Emma Gorge takes you to an Edenic swimming hole surrounded by red cliffs. See p. 482.

- **Prairie Hotel** (Flinders Ranges, SA; ✆ **08/8648 4844**): This remarkable tin-roofed, stone-walled Outback pub in the Flinders Ranges has quaint rooms, a great bar out front where you can meet the locals, and some of the best food in Australia. See p. 527.
- **Freycinet Lodge** (Freycinet National Park, Coles Bay, TAS; ✆ **03/6257 0101**): These eco-friendly bush cabins are right next to one of the nation's best walking trails. The ocean views from the magnificent restaurant and the surrounding balconies are spectacular. See p. 627.
- **Cradle Mountain Lodge** (Cradle Mountain, TAS; ✆ **13 24 69** in Australia, or 03/6492 1303): Just minutes from your comfortable cabin are 1,500-year-old trees, moss forests, craggy mountain ridges, limpid pools and lakes, and hordes of scampering marsupials. See p. 635.

## 13 The Best Places to Stay on a Shoestring

- **Sydney Central YHA** (Sydney, NSW; ✆ **02/9281 9111**): One of the biggest, busiest youth hostels in the world, this place has a popular night spot, a bistro selling cheap meals, pool tables, a movie room, a heated pool, and a sauna—all in the center of Sydney. See p. 121.
- **Arts Factory Lodge** (Byron Bay, NSW; ✆ **02/6685 7709**): A wacky, alternative place to stay that includes tepees, tents, rooms made from bark strips, and funky indoor "cubes." Workshops include didgeridoo making, massage, yoga, and even boxing! See p. 204.
- **Beachcomber Coconut Caravan Village** (Mission Beach, QLD; ✆ **1800/008 129**, or 07/4068 8129): Right across the road from what is arguably the prettiest beach in Australia, this oh-so-pretty campground has freshly painted cabins with little balconies, en-suite bathrooms, cooking facilities, and even separate bedrooms for you and the kids. Cassowaries wander out of the dense jungle at the back and come right up to you. See p. 306.
- **Halse Lodge** (Sunshine Coast, QLD; ✆ **1800/242 567** in Australia, or 07/5447 3377): How many backpacker lodges do you know of located in Heritage-listed Queenslander houses, with neat private rooms, incredibly cheap meals, a wide veranda with attractive furniture and garden views, an atmospheric bar and courtyard, and free surfboards to use at the excellent beach just a stroll away? Well, now you know this one. See p. 346.
- **The Kimberley Klub** (Broome, WA; ✆ **1800/004 345** in Australia, or 08/9192 3233): Low-slung Outback architecture, trendy private rooms, a rustic open-sided bar and restaurant serving great food, and a rock-lined pool make this one of the coolest places to stay in pricey Broome. See p. 490.

## 14 The Best Worth-a-Splurge Restaurants

- **Quay** (Sydney, NSW; ✆ **02/9251 5600**): Sydney's best seafood restaurant offers perhaps the loveliest view in town. Gaze through the large windows toward the Opera House, the city skyline, the North Shore suburbs, and the Harbour Bridge. See p. 134.
- **Fishlips Bar & Bistro** (Cairns, QLD; ✆ **07/4041 1700**): Clever ways with fresh seafood and uniquely

Aussie ingredients—such as crocodile—make this cheerful blue beach house on a busy Cairns highway a real winner. This place is the pick of the bunch in Cairns. See p. 284.

- **e'cco bistro** (Brisbane, QLD; ✆ **07/3831 8344**): Simple food, elegantly done, has won this small but tasteful bistro a stack of awards, and you'll soon see why. Not least among its titles is Australia's top restaurant award, the Remy Martin Cognac/Gourmet Traveler Restaurant of the Year. Reservations are essential. See p. 240.
- **Fraser's** (Perth, WA; ✆ **08/9481 7100**): The city center and Swan River sparkling in the sunshine seem so close that you can almost reach out and touch them from the terrace of this parkland restaurant. Superb mod Oz food turned out with flare and flavor is what you come here for; seafood is a specialty. You can go for a bike ride in Kings Park afterward to work it off. See p. 443.
- **Newtown House** (Vasse, near Margaret River, WA; ✆ **08/9755 4485**): Chef Stephen Reagan creates intelligent, flavorsome food that beautifully partners the premium Margaret River wines being made all around him. Stay in his homestead B&B overnight and explore the wineries the next day. See p. 465.
- **Prairie Hotel** (Flinders Ranges, SA; ✆ **08/8648 4844**): Chef Darren ("Bart") Brooks serves high-class cuisine in the middle of nowhere. His "feral" foods, such as kangaroo tail soup and a mixed grill of emu sausages, camel steak, and kangaroo, is remarkable. See p. 527.
- **The Tryst** (Canberra, ACT; ✆ **02/6239 4422**): Canberra has far grander and more expensive restaurants, but this place has found a spot in our hearts for its constantly delicious food. It's also relaxed, feeling almost communal on busy nights. See p. 604.

## 15 The Best Dining Bargains

- **Phillip's Foote** (Sydney, NSW; ✆ **02/9241 1485**): In the heart of the historic neighborhood known as The Rocks, this barbecue restaurant serves fish, meat, and poultry. Pick your own protein and throw it on the barbie in the courtyard behind a historic pub. See p. 133.
- **Govindas** (Sydney, NSW; ✆ **02/9380 5155**): Eat as much as you want at this Hare Krishna vegetarian restaurant in Kings Cross, and then take in a free movie at the theater upstairs. See p. 136.
- **Supreme View Café** (Sydney, NSW; ✆ **02/9230 8224**): This largely undiscovered restaurant and cafe is a must for the great value and the absolutely fantastic views reaching over Hyde Park and even to the harbor. See p. 134.
- **Mindil Beach Sunset Market** (Darwin, NT): Every Thursday night between May and October, thousands of Darwin folk pack wine and beach blankets and flock to this city beach to feast at food stalls featuring every Asian cuisine you can name, and a few you can't. Eat Vietnamese, Cambodian, Singaporean, Malaysian, Indonesian, and more, and then shop the 200 arts-and-crafts stalls, get a Chinese head massage, or have your tarot cards read. See p. 411.
- **Chinatown** (Melbourne, VIC): Head to this colorful part of town, centered on Little Bourke Street, for super cheap eats. You'll be hard-pressed to

find a lunch costing more than A$10 (US$8). This is where the locals go, so you know it has to be good—and authentic. See p. 535.

- **Irish Times** (Melbourne, VIC; ✆ **03/9642 1699**): An Irish bar more authentic than most, the Irish Times is a character-filled eatery with unusual dishes. See p. 546.
- **Queen Victoria Market** (Melbourne, VIC; ✆ **03/9269 5835**): The markets are the heart of this vibrant city, and there's nowhere better to pick up a satisfying snack. There are plenty of stalls selling fresh bread and deli fare for a picnic. See p. 554.

# 2

# Planning an Affordable Trip to Australia

*by Lee Mylne*

This chapter aims to answer all those practical questions that pop up as you plan your trip. How will I get there? How much will it cost? What should I see? How will I get around? Australia's a big country, and you probably won't be able to see all of it, so in this chapter and the rest of the book we give you no-nonsense advice on what's worth your time and money and what's not. We've done the legwork—finding the best deals on airfares, package deals, outdoor adventures, accommodations, and more—so you won't have to.

## 1 The $60-a-Day Premise

You might find it hard to believe that you can really travel and stay comfortably around this huge country for as little as $60 a day, but it can be done. In fact, Australia's abundance of family-run motels, authentic country pubs, friendly B&Bs, and inexpensive ethnic restaurants offer a wide variety of great eating, welcoming accommodations, and some of the most amazing sights you'll ever see, without sacrificing fun, comfort, or adventure to a budget.

The $60-a-day premise is based on the assumption of two adults traveling together who, between the two of them, have at least US$120 (or US$60 per person) to spend per day on accommodations and meals. (We used a calculation of A$1 = US80¢.) But fluctuations in the value of the Australian dollar against the U.S. dollar in recent years may mean you will get even more value for your money at the time you travel. Sightseeing, entertainment, and transportation costs are extra, but we have unearthed loads of free and next-to-free ways for you to see the sights and get around without breaking the bank. Because airfare is likely to be the most expensive part of your trip, we provide tips on finding deals and packages.

But make no mistake: This isn't a backpacker's guide to Oz. Although the book includes the best backpacker-style accommodations and hostels, its aim is to suggest the best places to stay and dine at the best price. In fact, if you frequent the places recommended and follow our money-saving tips on transportation and sightseeing, you'll be traveling the same way most Australians do. They would rather stay in a mid-priced country guesthouse that has a bit of charm and eat at the cheap, fabulous Thai nosh house, than pay a fortune to sit around a five-star resort's swimming pool eating $15 hamburgers.

## 2 50 Money-Saving Tips

Here's a handy roundup of 50 tips to help keep your travel costs to a minimum:

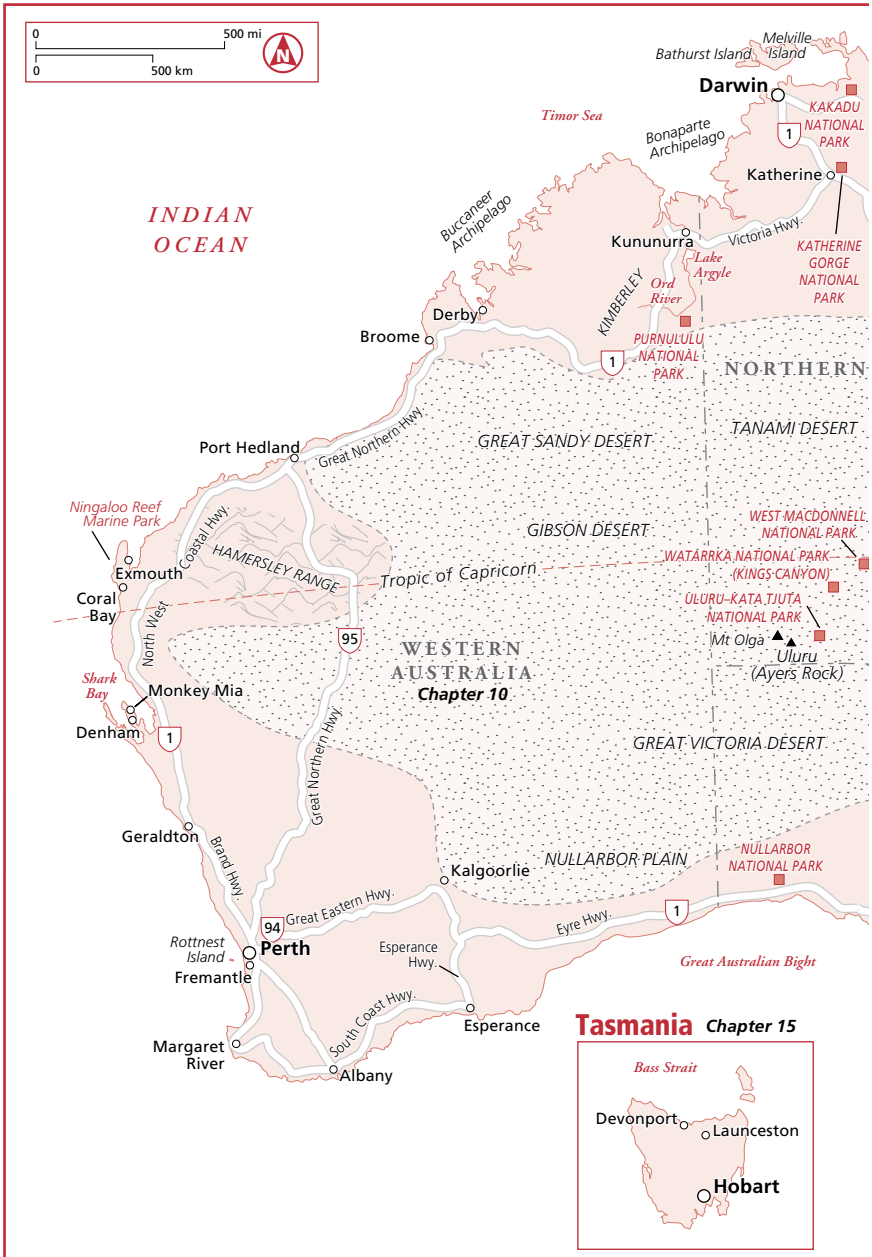
### GENERAL TRAVEL

1. Even if you never set foot in a youth hostel, a great buy is membership in the Australian Youth Hostels Association (AYHA), or its U.S. counterpart, Hostelling International-American Youth Hostels. It entitles you to a huge array of discounts. See "Youth Hostels & Backpacker Lodges," in "Tips on Accommodations," later in this chapter.
2. Try to buy a discounted ticket. Many companies, particularly airline ticket consolidators ("bucket shops") that buy tickets wholesale and some Australian tour companies, offer discounts for booking direct with them, rather than through a travel agent, to whom they must pay commission. Do check with the travel agent, too, to make sure you're getting the best deal or if you have complex traveling needs.
3. When booking a hotel room at a major chain or renting a car from a major agency, be sure to mention which frequent-flier programs you belong to and ask whether you qualify for miles. If you have acquired a load of frequent-flier miles, they may be redeemable for award travel, lodging and other travel-related needs.
4. If you are a senior or student, be sure to ask about discounts at every opportunity—booking your airfare, hotel, rental car, sightseeing tour; when purchasing theater tickets; or visiting any museum or attraction.
5. Full-time students should arm themselves with an **International Student Identity Card (ISIC),** which offers substantial savings on rail passes, plane tickets, and entrance fees. It also provides you with basic health and life insurance and a 24-hour help line. The card is available for $22 from **STA Travel** (✆ **800/781-4040,** and if you're not in North America there's probably a local number in your country; www.statravel.com), the biggest student travel agency in the world.
6. If you're no longer a student but are still under 26, you can get a **International Youth Travel Card (IYTC)** for the same price from the same people, which entitles you to some discounts (but not on museum admissions). ***Note:*** In 2002, STA Travel bought competitors **Council Travel** and **USIT Campus** after they went bankrupt. It's still operating some offices under the Council name, but they're owned by STA.
7. Before you purchase travel insurance, check that you do not already have it as part of your credit card agreement or existing health insurance policy. Check to see if your health insurance covers you for medical treatment and evacuation anywhere in the world and if your credit card company insures you against travel accidents if you buy plane, train, or bus tickets with its card. Your homeowner's insurance should cover stolen luggage. However, if you have paid a large portion of your vacation expenses upfront, consider buying trip cancellation insurance. (See "Travel Insurance" later in this chapter.)

### AIR TRAVEL

8. In terms of airfare, the off season runs from mid-April to the end of August. This is not only the cheapest time to fly from America, it's the best time to visit Australia! That's because Down Under winter (June–Aug), when the days are balmy and nice, is more pleasant than the too-hot summer (Dec–Feb).

# Australia


0
500 mi
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Melville Island
Bathurst Island
Darwin
Timor Sea
KAKADU NATIONAL PARK
Bonaparte Archipelago
Katherine
INDIAN OCEAN
Buccaneer Archipelago
Kununurra
Victoria Hwy.
Lake Argyle
Ord River
KATHERINE GORGE NATIONAL PARK
KIMBERLEY
Derby
Broome
PURNULULU NATIONAL PARK
NORTHERN
TANAMI DESERT
GREAT SANDY DESERT
Great Northern Hwy.
Port Hedland
Ningaloo Reef Marine Park
Coastal Hwy.
HAMERSLEY RANGE
GIBSON DESERT
WEST MACDONNELL NATIONAL PARK
WATARRKA NATIONAL PARK (KINGS CANYON)
Tropic of Capricorn
ULURU-KATA TJUTA NATIONAL PARK
Mt Olga
Uluru (Ayers Rock)
Exmouth
Coral Bay
North West
95
WESTERN AUSTRALIA
Chapter 10
Shark Bay
Monkey Mia
Denham
GREAT VICTORIA DESERT
Great Northern Hwy.
Geraldton
Brand Hwy.
Kalgoorlie
NULLARBOR PLAIN
NULLARBOR NATIONAL PARK
Great Eastern Hwy.
Eyre Hwy.
94
Rottnest Island
Perth
Fremantle
Esperance Hwy.
Great Australian Bight
South Coast Hwy.
Esperance
Margaret River
Albany
Tasmania Chapter 15
Bass Strait
Devonport
Launceston
Hobart

THE TOP END
Chapter 9
Thursday Island
Arnhemland
Gulf of Carpentaria
CAPE YORK PENINSULA
Coral Sea
Great Barrier Reef Marine Park
SOUTH PACIFIC OCEAN
Cooktown
DAINTREE NATIONAL PARK
Port Douglas
Cairns
Mission Beach
Stuart Hwy.
TERRITORY
Barkly Hwy.
66
Tennant Creek
87
Mt. Isa
Townsville
Flinders Hwy.
78
Whitsunday Islands National Park
Proserpine
Landsborough Hwy.
Mackay
GREAT DIVIDING RANGE
MACDONNELL RANGES
Alice Springs
THE RED CENTRE
Chapter 8
Longreach
66
1
Rockhampton
Capricorn Hwy.
Gladstone
SIMPSON DESERT
QUEENSLAND
Chapter 7
Bundaberg
Bruce Hwy.
Fraser Island
15
SOUTH AUSTRALIA
Chapter 11
Mitchell Hwy.
Brisbane
Chapter 6
Sunshine Coast
Coober Pedy
LAMINGTON NATL. PK.
Gold Coast
87
71
Lightning Ridge
1
Stuart Hwy.
FLINDERS RANGES NATIONAL PARK
Darling River
Barrier Hwy.
Coffs Harbour
New England Hwy.
Oxley Hwy.
Tamworth
Broken Hill
32
NEW SOUTH WALES
Chapter 5
Dubbo
Port Macquarie
Port Pirie
BLUE MTNS. NATL. PK.
Pacific Hwy.
Newcastle
Mildura
Hwy.
32
Adelaide
20
Newell Hwy.
Sydney
Chapter 4
Hume Hwy.
Murray River
Princes Hwy.
39
Dukes Hwy.
Kangaroo Island
Wodonga
CANBERRA
Chapter 14
Princes Hwy.
VICTORIA
Chapter 13
31
Albury
Mt. Kosciuszko
1
A.C.T.
Mt. Gambier
1
Ballarat
8
SNOWY MOUNTAINS
Geelong
Melbourne
Chapter 12
Tasman Sea
Apollo Bay
To Tasmania (see inset)

9. Traveling on certain days of the week can save you money. Monday-to-Thursday departures can shave an extra US$60 off your airfare.
10. Consider a package. Whether you opt for an independent or group tour, package deals are terrific values because they typically include airfare (usually from Los Angeles), decent accommodations, some or all meals, tours, transfers, and other extras. The per-day price of a package (including airfare) can work out to be about the same as a night's accommodations in a midrange hotel.
11. Look for travel agents and consolidators specializing in cheap fares to Australia. See "Getting There," later this chapter, for a list.
12. The quickest way between two points is not always the cheapest. Sometimes airlines and travel agents release spot specials for people prepared to travel via a lengthier route or at short notice. If this is you, scour the travel sections of newspapers and visit airline websites for the latest deals.
13. The cheapest fares are usually the ones with the most restrictions. With Qantas's 21-day advance purchase fare, for example, you must pay for the ticket within 21 days after booking and stay at least a week and no more than a month in Australia, and you can't make stopovers or change the routing once you have paid for the ticket. For many people, these conditions are fine for the trip they are planning.
14. Flying within Australia can be expensive—but not if you prepurchase coupons from Qantas. The coupons can cost less than half the regular fares. Only non-Australians can buy them, and you must buy them before you leave home.
15. Because air travel within Australia is so expensive, Qantas offers discounts of around 30% off for non-Australian passport holders. To obtain the discount, give your passport number when booking your flight.
16. If you belong to a frequent-flier club, use your miles to contribute toward your airfare or take advantage of any offers to buy miles at a reduced rate to reach an award level. If you are not already a frequent flier, join when you buy your ticket. The flight to Australia may earn you another trip!
17. To get even more frequent-flier miles, pay for your airline ticket on a credit card that gives you miles for every dollar you spend. Just be sure you don't get zapped with sky-high interest charges.

## ACCOMMODATIONS

18. Airfare and accommodations will take the biggest bite out of your budget, so investigate package tours that include both plane ticket and 5 or more nights' accommodations—often at substantial savings for both.
19. If you get an apartment with a full kitchen, you can save money by not eating out at every meal. Australian cities and holiday destinations are awash with such accommodations. Even if you make only breakfast every morning, you could save enough to splurge on a really special meal.
20. Try to avoid visiting Australia during the country's school holidays (see the "When to Go" section later in this chapter). Hotel and apartment rates in popular vacation spots like the Gold Coast, the Sunshine Coast, and Cairns in Queensland soar during the Australian school vacations.
21. Many accommodations chains offer discounted rates for customers of a particular car-rental company with which the hotel chain is partnered. When making your reservation or checking in, it never hurts to ask whether you qualify for a discount.

22. Bed-and-breakfasts are a friendly alternative to a cheerless motel room, and in Oz they're often quite cheap. Many pretty B&Bs charge A$75 (US$60) or less for a double room with breakfast—about the same as a motel room without breakfast. We recommend many B&Bs; see the "Tips on Accommodations" section later in this chapter for details on how to find more.
23. Youth hostels and backpacker lodges are not just for the young. Some are almost as good as resorts, with a pool, a tour desk, and Internet access, and they often offer inexpensive meals. Many have basic but clean private rooms for well under A$50 (US$40) for a double. As long as you can handle sharing a bathroom, these rooms are often the cheapest comfortable beds in town.
24. The YWCA has comfortable budget hotels in Sydney, Melbourne, and Darwin with private rooms, dorms, and family rooms—a cut above the average backpacker digs. (See the "Tips on Accommodations" section later in this chapter.)
25. Many pubs, especially those in the country, offer lodging. Staying in a pub can be a money-saving option if you don't mind sharing a bathroom (some have private bathrooms, but don't expect it) and coping with the din of drinkers in the bar downstairs (often until midnight Fri and Sat). The quality varies, but most rooms have a measure of historical charm. Rates can be as little as A$40 (US$32) for a double and are rarely more than A$75 (US$60); most include breakfast.
26. Most hotels accommodate kids up to age 12 (and even older) free of charge in your room if they use existing beds; if a hotel does charge extra for a child, it's usually only A$10 to A$20 (US$8–US$16) at most.

## LOCAL TRANSPORTATION

27. Bus travel in Oz is a good deal—the buses are clean, the seats are comfortable, and you sometimes even get a video onboard. The national coach company, Greyhound Australia, has great value passes.
28. Train fares in Australia cost about the same as bus fares, if you travel in a sitting berth (the seats recline somewhat). If you want a sleeper cabin, fares get expensive fast. Check out the money-saving passes Rail Australia offers, outlined in "Getting Around Australia," later this chapter.
29. Countrylink, which oversees rail travel in New South Wales, Victoria, and Queensland, offers advance-purchase discounts of up to 40%.
30. Before you book a rental car, consider whether you really need one. In major tourist towns like Alice Springs and Cairns, travelers fall into the trap of renting a car and then letting it sit outside their hotel the whole vacation because every local tour company picked them up at the door. If you need a car only to drive into town for dinner, take a cab.
31. Fill up your rental car at a nearby gas station before you return it, not at the much-more-expensive car-rental depot's pump.
32. Gas in cities is often cheaper on Mondays because most people fill up their tanks before the weekend.
33. Whether you go by air, rail, bus, or car, try not to backtrack. In a country as big as Australia, you can waste a lot of money retracing your steps.
34. Don't buy maps. Most visitor centers dispense free or next-to-free maps of the area. If you are a member of an automobile club with which the Australian Automobile Association (AAA) has a reciprocal agreement, you can often get free state, regional, and city road maps. The American

Automobile Association and the automobile associations in the U.K., Canada, and New Zealand have such an arrangement with Australia. Pick up the maps before you leave or collect them at the AAA offices in Australia. See "Getting Around Australia: By Car" for locations.

## WINING & DINING

35. The letters to look for when dining out in Oz are BYO, which means Bring Your Own: Buy wine or beer at the cheapest bottle shop ("liquor store" to Americans, "off-license" to Brits) you can find, and take it to the restaurant to drink with your meal. That way you avoid the markup of 100%, 200%, or more that restaurateurs are so fond of adding. All you pay is a corkage charge of about A$1 to A$3 (US80¢–US$2.40) per person.
36. Go ethnic and you're almost guaranteed great food at low prices—Indian, Cambodian, Malaysian, Vietnamese, Italian, and Thai are all pretty sure bets. The smarter Chinese restaurants are good, but often a tad pricey, and not always BYO.
37. An advantage of going out for Asian food is that dishes are usually shared, so small eaters can get away with not ordering a whole meal for themselves (great for families). Because one Asian main course is often enough for two people, the golden rule is to order and eat one dish first, then order a second if you need it.
38. In cities, head to an Italian sidewalk cafe for tasty pasta and stylish sandwiches. A focaccia sandwich with salami, provolone cheese, sun-dried tomatoes, and arugula will set you back around A$8 (US$6.40) and keep you going till dinner.
39. Backpacker lodges, youth hostels, and universities (colleges) almost always have restaurants or cafes attached that serve up tasty, healthy food for not much money.
40. Tipping is not necessary, although it is common to tip 5% to 10% in restaurants and round cab fares up to the nearest A$1 (US80¢). Plenty of Aussies don't tip, so don't feel embarrassed about hanging on to your coins.
41. If you are traveling by car, keep a box of cereal and long-life milk in the trunk and use the hotel coffee cups as bowls. It beats paying A$10 (US$8) for the same thing in the hotel restaurant.
42. RSL (Returned and Services League) clubs and League clubs (as in Rugby League football) serve hearty meals—along the roast, chicken Kiev, and steak lines, with vegetables or salad, and bread and potato included—for around A$10 (US$8). You will have to sign in before you enter the club and put up with their uniquely lurid brand of neon-lit decor, but that's part of the fun. Kids' meals are about A$5 (US$4).

## TOURS & SIGHTSEEING

43. Australian city councils are big on providing free entertainment—for example, Sydney has free dance performances or concerts at Darling Harbour many weekends, and free lunchtime concerts in Martin Place most days; Brisbane has street performers at South Bank Parklands most weekends; and Darwin has free Sunday Jazz by the sea at the MGM Grand Casino in Dry season. Check local newspapers for details.
44. You can often get half-price theater tickets on the day of the performance. We've listed half-price ticket agencies in the "After Dark" sections of each chapter, where relevant. Matinees are often around A$8 (US$6.40) cheaper than evening shows.
45. Walking tours can be half the price of bus tours, and they give you a good close-up view of the city and sights.

## SHOPPING

46. Skincare products, cosmetics, perfume, electronics, imported designer accessories, liquor, cigarettes, and other luxury items attract high duty in Australia. If you need to buy these, shop in duty-free stores, which can be found in capital cities and major tourist destinations. You will need to show your airline ticket and passport to buy.
47. If you buy anything expensive—jewelry, for example—ask if there is a tax-free price for international travelers. Most non-duty-free stores selling jewelry, electronic equipment, and other high-ticket items offer tax-free prices to international travelers who show their airline ticket and passport.
48. Aboriginal artifacts make great souvenirs and gifts, but look for the shops a block or two away from the center of town, which sell the same items a good bit cheaper than the ones on the main shopping streets.

## NIGHTLIFE

49. At pubs, there are no cover charges, and drinks are cheaper than in nightclubs. Some have live entertainment, pool, and sports video screens.
50. Aussies love beer any time, but it never tastes better than during happy hour, that period from around 4 to 6pm when many city bars and pubs mark drinks down to half price or less. Happy hours are especially common Thursday and Friday, but any time of the week you are never far from a pub that makes an art form of brand-based specials.

# 3 The Regions in Brief

About 84% of Australia's 20 million people huddle in cities around the coast, covering a mere 1% of this vast continent. The reason is simple: Much of Australia is harsh Outback country, characterized by savanna land, spectacular rocky outcrops, shifting deserts, and dry salt lakes. In these parts of the country, the soil is poor and the rainfall scarce, and some rivers don't even make it to the ocean. The roads that traverse the interior are sometimes barely distinguishable, and most people choose air travel or stick to the coastal fringe.

In spectacular contrast, on the coast—particularly in the east, where most people live—nature's bounty has almost overdone it. Here, Australia is blessed with one of the greatest natural attractions in the world: the Great Barrier Reef. There are also rainforests in Queensland, alpine scenery in Tasmania, wildflowers in Western Australia, rolling wine country in South Australia, a great coastal drive in Victoria, bird-filled wetlands in the Northern Territory, and countless sand beaches more or less everywhere.

Australia consists of six states—New South Wales, Queensland, Victoria, South Australia, Western Australia, and Tasmania—and two internal territories, the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) and the Northern Territory. The national capital is Canberra, in the ACT.

See the map on p. 20 or the map on the inside back cover to visualize the regions described here.

**NEW SOUTH WALES** Australia's most populated state is also the most visited by tourists. They come to see Sydney—and who can blame them? It's one of the most glamorous and beautiful cities in the world, with dozens of harbor and ocean beaches in and around it, and a mixture of bushland and city development around Sydney Harbour. Sydney is also a good base for day trips or overnight excursions inland, especially to the scenic Blue Mountains and the wineries of the Hunter Valley.

Farther afield, a string of quaint beachside towns stretches all the way down the southern coast to Victoria. Along the north coast are remnant areas of rainforest and a more tropical air in the laidback hangout of Byron Bay.

The inland is dry and sparsely forested. Highlights include the mining town of Broken Hill (known for wildlife, art galleries, and Aboriginal influences), and Outback opal-mining towns White Cliffs and Lightning Ridge, which exist in a wacky underground world of their own.

**QUEENSLAND** Without a doubt, the biggest draw for visitors to Queensland is the Great Barrier Reef. Ogling the tropical fish, sea creatures, and rainbow-hued corals is a holiday highlight for most people. The Reef stretches more than 2,000km (1,240 miles) along Queensland's coast, as far south as Bundaberg, 384km (238 miles) north of Brisbane, the state capital. Alluring island resorts dot the coast; while most are expensive, we've found a few that won't break the bank.

Queensland is also known for its white-sand beaches. Many of the best are on the Gold Coast in the state's south (about an hour's drive from Brisbane), and the Sunshine Coast (a 2-hr. drive north of Brisbane). Cairns and Port Douglas in the north have their fair share of beaches, too, but be warned: Swimming in their waters can be *very* hazardous to your health. Deadly box jellyfish, or "stingers," halt all ocean swimming at beaches in the northern third of the country from October through May. In Queensland, stingers may be found in all coastal waters north of Gladstone. Most patrolled beaches in these areas have "stinger nets," which aim to keep the little blighters out, but the thimble-sized Irakandji jellyfish is small enough to sneak through the mesh, and its sting can be fatal. All patrolled beaches have warning signs, and the lifeguards do regular net drags to see if there are any in the water. If they find any, they promptly close the beach. But to be absolutely sure, at this time of year you should stick to the waterfront lagoons at Airlie Beach and Cairns, or to your hotel pool. The jellyfish are mainly found in coastal waters and do not interfere with Great Barrier Reef activities like snorkeling or scuba diving, which are out of the habitat of marine stingers.

Island swimming is mostly stinger-free, but be careful and ask advice from the lifeguards before plunging into that inviting water.

One of the most appealing of Queensland's destinations is the aquatic playground made up of the 74 Whitsunday Islands in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. These mostly uninhabited islands are a paradise for kayaking, snorkeling, scuba diving, fishing, hiking, birding, and bareboat sailing.

Another big attraction is the lush 110-million-year-old Daintree rainforest, just north of Port Douglas.

Brisbane has Australia's largest koala sanctuary (you can cuddle one if you like), and you can hand-feed wild dolphins on a day trip across Brisbane's Moreton Bay. In the Gold Coast hinterland is Lamington National Park, a rainforested mountain region great for hiking and spotting wildlife.

**THE RED CENTRE** The eerie silence of Uluru, also known as Ayers Rock, is what draws everyone to the sprawling ocher sands of the Red Centre, the heart of the Northern Territory. Many visitors make the delightful discovery that the lesser-known nearby domes of Kata Tjuta, or "the Olgas," are even more spectacular (if that's possible). A half-day's drive from the Rock brings you to Kings Canyon, an awesomely lovely desert gorge popular with hikers. If you visit the Red Centre, try to spend at least a few days in Alice Springs. This laid-back Outback town has the best Aboriginal arts

and crafts shopping in Australia, Aboriginal tours, a world-class desert wildlife park, stunning scenery, hikes through the stark MacDonnell Ranges, an Outback ranch to stay at, and even camel rides along a dry riverbed.

**THE TOP END** The northwest reaches of the country (from the rocky red ranges of the Kimberley in Western Australia to the northern third of the Northern Territory) encompass what Aussies eloquently dub the Top End. This is Crocodile Dundee territory, a remote, vast, semidesert region where the cattle probably outnumber the people. In this book, we have concentrated on the Northern Territory section of the Top End. (The Kimberley appears in the Western Australia chapter.)

Near the tropical city of Darwin, the territory's capital, is Kakadu National Park, where you can cruise past crocodiles on inland billabongs (ponds), bird-watch, and visit ancient Aboriginal rock-art sites. Closer to Darwin is Litchfield National Park, where you can take a dip in fern-fringed swimming holes surrounded by red cliffs—stuff straight from Eden. You can cruise the waterways of Katherine Gorge, a few hours' drive south of Darwin, or explore them by canoe. Near Katherine you can canoe rarely explored, croc-infested inland rivers and learn to make your own didgeridoo (a large wooden traditional Aboriginal musical instrument).

**WESTERN AUSTRALIA** Distance and high airfares work against Western Australia's tourism industry, which is a shame because this is one of Australia's most wild and beautiful regions. The seas teem with whales in season, and thrill-seekers can swim alongside gigantic but gentle whale sharks on the Northwest Cape every fall (Mar–June). This cape is home to one of Australia's best-kept secrets, a second barrier reef called Ningaloo Marine Park, which runs for 260km (161 miles). It's one of the few reefs in the world to grow on a western coast. You can snorkel with manta rays or try the fantastic diving. Just 19km (12 miles) off Perth, snorkelers can gaze at corals and fish on Rottnest Island, and in Shark Bay at Monkey Mia, tourists can greet wild dolphins (or is it the other way around?).

In the southwest hook of the continent lies the Margaret River wine region. Wild forests, thundering surf, dramatic cliffs, rich bird life, and wild 'roos make it one of the country's most attractive wine regions. The state's capital, Perth, has surf beaches and a restored 19th-century port with a fun atmosphere and some great museums. One or 2 hours' drive from the city brings you to some cute towns, like the Spanish Benedictine monastery town of New Norcia. Inland, the state is mostly wheat fields and desert, but if you have the inclination, head 600km (372 miles) east of Perth to the gold-mining town of Kalgoorlie, where you'll find the world's largest open-cast gold mine. With its gracious pubs lining the bustling streets, it's what an Aussie country town should look like.

In the Kimberley, you can visit the ancient Geikie and Windjana gorges, farms where the world's best South Sea pearls grow, and the charming (in a corrugated-iron sort of way) beachside town of Broome. This tract of the country is so little populated and underexplored that most Aussies never contemplate coming here. Getting around is expensive because it is so vast. Near Kununurra, on the eastern edge of the Kimberley, is a million-acre cattle station, El Questro, where you can camp in tents (or stay in an upmarket—read "expensive"—homestead). From Kununurra you can fly over or hike into the beehive-shaped rock formation of the Bungle Bungles; cruise on the bird-rich, croc-infested Ord River; and tour the Argyle Diamond Mine, the world's biggest.

**SOUTH AUSTRALIA** Stretched between Western Australia and Victoria is

the nation's breadbasket, South Australia. The capital, Adelaide, is a stately place known for its conservatism, parks, and churches. It makes an ideal base for exploring Australia's illustrious wine region, the Barossa Valley. Big labels like Penfolds, Seppelts, and Wolf Blass are here, but take time to sniff out the many smaller, though no less outstanding, vineyards. And it's less than an hour from the city!

Bring your binoculars to the massive water-bird sanctuary, the Coorong. Stay in an underground hotel in the offbeat opal-mining town of Coober Pedy (it's too hot above ground) or order a 'roo-burger at the historic Prairie Hotel in the craggy, ancient lands of the Flinders Ranges in the South Australian Outback.

The greatest of South Australia's attractions—apart from wine, of course—is Kangaroo Island, the best place in Australia to see native animals. In a day you can spot wallabies, kangaroos, koalas, oodles of birds (from black swans to kookaburras), echidnas, and penguins. The beach teems with sea lions.

**VICTORIA** Australia's second-largest city, Melbourne, is the capital of Victoria. Melbourne is more stately and "Old World" than Sydney and offers an exciting mix of ethnicities and the country's best fashion shopping. Nearby Phillip Island is famous for its Penguin Parade, during which hundreds of tiny penguins dash up the beach to their burrows at dusk. The historic gold-mining city of Ballarat is not far away. Victoria is also the site of one of Australia's great road trips, the Great Ocean Road. It stretches for 106km (66 miles) along the southern coast, where the eroded rock towers named the Twelve Apostles stand tall in the sea. Then there's the inland "high country," the stomping ground of the title character in Banjo Paterson's 1890 poem "The Man from Snowy River."

**AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY (ACT)** The Australian Capital Territory is surrounded entirely by New South Wales. The ACT is made up of bushland and the nation's capital, Canberra, a planned city similar in architectural concept to Washington, D.C. Many Australians consider the capital boring, but Canberra will surprise you. It has some of the country's best museums and great restaurants, so don't automatically exclude it from your itinerary.

**TASMANIA** Last stop before Antarctica is the island state of Tasmania. Visit the Apple Isle for its beautiful national parks, stretches of alpine wilderness and gloomy forests, fruit and lavender farms, the world's best trout fishing, and an exquisitely slow pace of life rarely experienced anywhere else. If you're up to it, you could tackle the Overland Track, an 85km (53-mile) hiking trail between Cradle Mountain and Lake St. Clair that passes through highland moors, dense rainforests, and several mountains. A more leisurely option is a visit to the picturesque stone ruins of Port Arthur, Australia's version of Devil's Island, where thousands of convicts brought in to settle the new British colony were imprisoned and died. All of Tasmania is spectacular, but you haven't seen anything until you've experienced Freycinet National Park, with its pink granite outcrops set against an emerald-green sea.

## 4 Visitor Information

The **Australian Tourist Commission** is the best source of information on traveling Down Under. Its website, www.australia.com, has more than 10,000 pages of listings of tour operators, hotels, car-rental companies, special travel outfitters, holidays, maps, distance charts, suggested itineraries, and much more. The site provides

information tailored to travelers from your country of origin, including packages and deals. By signing up for the free online Travel Club, you will receive e-mail news of hot deals, events, and the like on a regular basis. You can also order brochures online. The ATC operates a website only, no telephone lines. Other good sources are the websites of Australia's state tourism marketing offices:

- **Canberra Tourism:** www.canberratourism.com.au.
- **Northern Territory Tourist Commission:** www.travelnt.com or www.australiasoutback.com.
- **South Australian Tourism Commission:** www.southaustralia.com.
- **Tourism New South Wales:** www.visitnsw.com.au or www.sydneyaustralia.com.
- **Tourism Queensland:** www.queenslandholidays.com.au or www.destinationqueensland.com.
- **Tourism Tasmania:** www.discovertasmania.com.
- **Tourism Victoria:** www.visitvictoria.com.
- **Western Australian Tourism Commission:** www.westernaustralia.com.

## 5 Entry Requirements & Customs

### ENTRY REQUIREMENTS

Along with a current passport valid for the duration of your stay, the Australian government requires a visa from visitors of every nation, except New Zealand, to be issued before you arrive. If you are short-term visitor or business traveler, the process is easy and can be done in a few minutes on the Internet (for a small cost), using the Australian government's Electronic Travel Authority (ETA). This is an electronic visa that takes the place of a stamp in your passport.

Tourists should apply for a Visitor ETA. It's free and valid for as many visits to Australia as you like of up to 3 months each within a 1-year period. Tourists may not work in Australia, so if you are visiting for business, you have two choices: Apply for a free Short Validity Business ETA, which covers a single visit of 3 months within a 1-year period, or pay A$65 (US$52) to apply for a Long Validity Business visa, which entitles you to as many 3-month stays in Australia as you like for the life of your passport but cannot be done online.

You can apply for an ETA yourself or have your travel agent or airline do it for you when you book your plane ticket. (This service may incur a fee.) To apply online, visit www.eta.immi.gov.au; the A$20 (US$16) charge is payable by credit card (Amex, Diners Club, MasterCard, or Visa). Assuming you do not have a criminal conviction and are in good health, your ETA should be approved quickly. You can also apply for the visa at Australian embassies, high commissions, and consulates (see below). Children traveling on their parent's passport must have their own ETA.

Fees mentioned in this section are in Australian dollars; the exact amount charged by the Australian embassy, consulate, or high commission in your country will depend on the foreign currency exchange rate.

If your travel agent or airline is not connected to the ETA system, you will need to apply for a visa the old-fashioned way—by taking or mailing your passport, a completed visa application form, and the appropriate payment to your nearest Australian embassy or consulate. In the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Ireland, and many other countries, most agents and airlines are ETA-compatible. You will also need to go the old-fashioned route if you are someone other

### Tips Passport Savvy

Allow plenty of time before your trip to apply for a passport; processing normally takes 3 weeks but can take longer during busy periods (especially spring). And keep in mind that if you need a passport in a hurry, you'll pay a higher processing fee. When traveling, safeguard your passport in an inconspicuous, inaccessible place like a money belt and keep a copy of the critical pages with your passport number in a separate place. If you lose your passport, visit the nearest embassy or consulate of your native country as soon as possible for a replacement.

than a tourist or a business traveler—for example, a student studying in Australia, a businessperson staying longer than 3 months, a long-term resident, a sportsperson, a member of the media, a performer, or a member of a social group or cultural exchange. If you fall into one of these categories, you will need to apply for a Temporary Residence visa. There is an A$65 (US$52) fee for non-ETA tourist and business visas for stays of up to 3 months and an A$165 (US$132) fee for business visas for stays between 3 months and 4 years. Non-ETA visa application fees for other kinds of travelers vary, from free to thousands of dollars. Contact the nearest Australian embassy, consulate, or high commission for more information.

Apply for non-ETA visas at Australian embassies, consulates, and high commissions. In the United States, apply to the Australian Embassy, 1601 Massachusetts Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20036 (✆ **202/797-3000;** dimia-washington@dfat.gov.au). The website of the Australian Embassy in North America is www.austemb.org. In Canada, contact the Australian High Commission, 50 O'Connor St., No. 710, Ottawa, ON K1P 6L2 (✆ **888/990-8888;** www.ahc-ottawa.org). For business-visa inquiries in the United States and Canada, call ✆ **800/579-7664.** In the United Kingdom and Ireland, contact the Australian High Commission, Australia House, The Strand, London WC2B 4LA (✆ **020/09065 508900** for 24-hr. recorded information; www.australia.org.uk). There is no counter service at the High Commission in London, and you should obtain an application form for a non-ETA visa by post or over the Internet at the Australian Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs website (www.immi.gov.au). This site also has a good explanation of the ETA system.

Allow at least a month for processing of non-ETA visas.

For information on how to get a passport, go to "Passports" in the "Fast Facts: Australia" section, later in this chapter—the websites listed provide downloadable passport applications as well as the current fees for processing passport applications. For an up-to-date country-by-country listing of passport requirements around the world, go to the "Foreign Entry Requirement" website of the U.S. State Department at **http://travel.state.gov/foreignentryreqs.html**.

## CUSTOMS

### WHAT YOU CAN BRING INTO AUSTRALIA

The duty-free allowance in Australia is A$900 (US$720) or, for those under 18, A$450 (US$360). Anyone over 18 can bring in up to 250 cigarettes or 250 grams of cigars or other tobacco products, 2.25 liters (41 fl. oz.) of alcohol, and "dutiable goods" to the value of A$900 (US$720), or A$450 (US$360) if you are under 18. "Dutiable goods" are luxury items such as perfume, watches, jewelry,

furs, plus gifts of any kind. Keep this in mind if you intend to bring presents for family and friends in Australia; gifts given to you also count toward the dutiable limit. Personal goods that you're taking with you are usually exempt from duty, but if you are returning with valuable goods that you already own, file form B263. Customs officers do not collect duty of less than A$50 (US$40) as long as you declared the goods in the first place. A helpful brochure, available from Australian consulates or Customs offices, as well as online, is *Know Before You Go.* For more information, contact Australian Customs Services, Locked Bag 3000, Sydney International Airport, NSW 2020 (✆ **02/8339 6714**), or check out www.customs.gov.au.

You need not declare cash in any currency and other currency instruments, such as traveler's checks, under a value of A$10,000 (US$8,000). Firearms in Australia are strictly controlled; contact the nearest Australian diplomatic post for advice on importing a handgun.

Australia is a signatory to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), which restricts or bans the import of products made from protected wildlife. Examples of the restricted items are coral, giant clam, wildcat, monkey, zebra, crocodile or alligator, bear, some types of caviar, American ginseng, and orchid products. Banned items include ivory, tortoise (marine turtle) shell, rhinoceros or tiger products, and sturgeon caviar. Bear this in mind if you stop in other countries en route to Australia. Australian authorities may seize and not return the items to you.

Because Australia is an island, it is free of many agricultural and livestock diseases. To keep it that way, strict quarantine applies to importing plants, animals, and their products, including food. "Sniffer" dogs at Australian airports detect these products (as well as drugs). Some items may be held for treatment and returned to you, others may be confiscated, and others may be held over for you to take with you when you leave the country. Amnesty trash bins are available before you reach the immigration counters in airport arrivals halls for items such as fruit. Don't be alarmed if, just before landing, the flight attendants spray the aircraft cabin (with products approved by the World Health Organization) to kill potentially disease-bearing insects. For more information on what is and is not allowed, contact the nearest Australian embassy or consulate, or Australia's Department of Agriculture, Fisheries, and Forestry, which runs the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (✆ **02/6272 3933;** www.affa.gov.au). Its website contains a list of restricted or banned foodstuffs, animal and plant products, and other items.

## WHAT YOU CAN TAKE HOME FROM AUSTRALIA

Returning **U.S. citizens** who have been away for at least 48 hours are allowed to bring back, once every 30 days, US$800 worth of merchandise duty-free. You'll be charged a flat rate of duty on the next US$1,000 worth of purchases. Any dollar amount beyond that is dutiable at whatever rates apply. On mailed gifts, the duty-free limit is US$200. Be sure to have your receipts or purchases handy to expedite the declaration process. ***Note:*** If you owe duty, you are required to pay on your arrival in the United States, either by cash, personal check, government or traveler's check, or money order, and in some locations, a Visa or MasterCard.

To avoid having to pay duty on foreign-made personal items you already own, bring along a bill of sale, insurance policy, jeweler's appraisal, or receipts of purchase. Or you can register items that can be readily identified by a permanently affixed serial number or marking—think laptop computers, cameras,

and CD players—with Customs before you leave. Take the items to the nearest Customs office or register them with Customs at the airport from which you're departing. You'll receive, at no cost, a Certificate of Registration, which allows duty-free entry for the life of the item.

With some exceptions, you cannot bring fresh fruits and vegetables into the United States. For specifics on what you can bring back, download the invaluable free pamphlet *Know Before You Go* online at **www.cbp.gov**. (Click on "Travel," and then click on "Know Before You Go! Online Brochure.") Or contact the **U.S. Customs & Border Protection (CBP),** 1300 Pennsylvania Ave., NW, Washington, DC 20229 (✆ **877/287-8667**), and request the pamphlet.

For a clear summary of **Canadian** rules, write for the booklet *I Declare,* issued by the **Canada Border Services Agency** (✆ **800/461-9999** in Canada, or 204/983-3500; www.cbsa-asfc.gc.ca). Canada allows its citizens a C$750 exemption, and you're allowed to bring back duty-free one carton of cigarettes, one can of tobacco, 40 imperial ounces of liquor, and 50 cigars. In addition, you're allowed to mail gifts to Canada valued at less than C$60 a day, provided they're unsolicited and don't contain alcohol or tobacco (write on the package "Unsolicited gift, under $60 value"). All valuables should be declared on the Y-38 form before departure from Canada, including serial numbers of valuables you already own, such as foreign-made cameras. ***Note:*** The $750 exemption can only be used once a year and only after an absence of 7 days.

U.K. citizens returning from **a non-E.U. country (including Australia)** have a customs allowance of: 200 cigarettes; 50 cigars; 250 grams of smoking tobacco; 2 liters of still table wine; 1 liter of spirits or strong liqueurs (over 22% volume); 2 liters of fortified wine, sparkling wine, or other liqueurs; 60cc (ml) perfume; 250cc (ml) of toilet water; and £145 worth of all other goods, including gifts and souvenirs. People under 17 cannot have the tobacco or alcohol allowance. For more information, contact HM Customs & Excise at ✆ **0845/010-9000** (020/8929-0152 outside the U.K.), or consult their website at www.hmce.gov.uk.

The duty-free allowance for **New Zealand** is NZ$700. Citizens over 17 can bring in 200 cigarettes, 50 cigars, or 250 grams of tobacco (or a mixture of all three if their combined weight doesn't exceed 250g); plus 4.5 liters of wine and beer, or 1.125 liters of liquor. New Zealand currency does not carry import or export restrictions. Fill out a certificate of export, listing the valuables you are taking out of the country; that way, you can bring them back without paying duty. Most questions are answered in a free pamphlet available at New Zealand consulates and Customs offices: *New Zealand Customs Guide for Travellers, Notice no. 4.* For more information, contact **New Zealand Customs,** The Customhouse, 17–21 Whitmore St., Box 2218, Wellington (✆ **04/473-6099** or 0800/428-786; www.customs.govt.nz).

## 6 Money

For American and European travelers, Australia is very affordable because of the perilous state of the Australian dollar during the past few years. Most travelers will find money matters relatively easy in Australia, but beware the small town where traveler's checks may not be readily accepted.

### CURRENCY

The Australian dollar is divided into 100¢. Coins are 5¢, 10¢, 20¢, and 50¢

### The Australian Dollar, the U.S. Dollar & the British Pound

**For U.S. Readers** The rate of exchange used to calculate the dollar values given in this book was US$1 = approximately A$1.25 (or A$1 = US80¢).

**For British Readers** The rate of exchange used to calculate the pound values in the accompanying table was £1 = A$2.45 (or A$1 = 40p).

***Note:*** International exchange rates for the Australian dollar can fluctuate markedly. Check the latest rate when you plan your trip. The table below, and all the prices in this book, should be used only as a guide.

| A$ | US$ | UK£ | A$ | US$ | UK£ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 0.25 | 0.20 | 0.10 | 30.00 | 24.00 | 12.00 |
| 0.50 | 0.40 | 0.20 | 35.00 | 28.00 | 14.00 |
| 1.00 | 0.80 | 0.40 | 40.00 | 32.00 | 16.00 |
| 2.00 | 1.60 | 0.80 | 45.00 | 36.00 | 18.00 |
| 3.00 | 2.40 | 1.20 | 50.00 | 40.00 | 20.00 |
| 4.00 | 3.20 | 1.60 | 55.00 | 44.00 | 22.00 |
| 5.00 | 4.00 | 2.00 | 60.00 | 48.00 | 24.00 |
| 6.00 | 4.80 | 2.40 | 65.00 | 52.00 | 26.00 |
| 7.00 | 5.60 | 2.80 | 70.00 | 56.00 | 28.00 |
| 8.00 | 6.40 | 3.20 | 75.00 | 60.00 | 30.00 |
| 9.00 | 7.20 | 3.60 | 80.00 | 64.00 | 32.00 |
| 10.00 | 8.00 | 4.00 | 85.00 | 68.00 | 34.00 |
| 15.00 | 12.00 | 6.00 | 90.00 | 72.00 | 36.00 |
| 20.00 | 16.00 | 8.00 | 95.00 | 76.00 | 38.00 |
| 25.00 | 20.00 | 10.00 | 100.00 | 80.00 | 40.00 |

pieces (silver) and $1 and $2 pieces (gold). Prices often end in a variant of 1¢ and 2¢ (for example, 78¢ or $2.71), a relic from the days before 1-cent and 2-cent pieces were phased out. Prices are rounded to the nearest 5¢—so 77¢ rounds down to 75¢, and 78¢ rounds up to 80¢. Bank notes come in denominations of $5, $10, $20, $50, and $100.

**The Universal Currency Converter** (www.xe.com/ucc) will give you up-to-the-minute conversions for your dollar or pound in dozens of countries.

It's a good idea to exchange at least some money—just enough to cover airport incidentals and transportation to your hotel—before you leave home (though don't expect the exchange rate to be ideal) so you can avoid lines at airport ATMs (automated teller machines). You can exchange money at your local American Express or Thomas Cook office or your bank. If you're far away from a bank with currency-exchange services, **American Express** offers traveler's checks and foreign currency, though with a $15 order fee and additional shipping costs, at www.americanexpress.com or ✆ **800/807-6233.**

## ATMs

The easiest and best way to get cash away from home is from an ATM (automated teller machine). The **Cirrus** (✆ **800/424-7787;** www.mastercard.com) and **PLUS**

(✆ **800/843-7587;** www.visa.com) networks span the globe; look at the back of your bank card to see which network you're on, then call or check online for ATM locations at your destination. Be sure you know your personal identification number (PIN) and be sure to find out your daily withdrawal limit before you depart. Also keep in mind that many banks impose a fee every time a card is used at a different bank's ATM, and that fee can be higher for international transactions (up to $5 or more) than for domestic ones (where they're rarely more than $1.50). On top of this, the bank from which you withdraw cash may charge its own fee. For international withdrawal fees, ask your bank.

You can also get cash advances on your credit card at an ATM. Keep in mind that credit card companies try to protect themselves from theft by limiting the funds someone can withdraw outside their home country, so call your credit card company before you leave. And keep in mind that you'll pay interest from the moment of your withdrawal, even if you pay your monthly bills on time.

Most ATMs in Australia will be linked to a network that likely includes your bank at home. In Outback areas, carry cash and a credit card because ATMs can be hard to find in small country towns, and shopkeepers in remote parts may not cash traveler's checks.

## TRAVELER'S CHECKS

Traveler's checks are something of an anachronism from the days before the ATM made cash accessible at any time. Traveler's checks used to be the only sound alternative to traveling with dangerously large amounts of cash. They were as reliable as currency, but, unlike cash, could be replaced if lost or stolen.

These days, traveler's checks are less necessary because most cities have 24-hour ATMs that allow you to withdraw small amounts of cash as needed. However, keep in mind that you will likely be charged an ATM withdrawal fee if the bank is not your own, so if you're withdrawing money every day, you might be better off with traveler's checks—provided that you don't mind showing identification every time you want to cash one.

However, be warned that traveler's checks are not as widely accepted in Australia as in many other countries. If you do opt for them, get them in Australian dollars. Checks in U.S. dollars are accepted at banks, big hotels, currency exchanges, and some shops in major tourist regions, but smaller shops, restaurants, and other businesses will have no idea what the exchange rate is when you present a U.S. check. Another advantage of Australian-dollar checks is that the two largest Aussie banks, ANZ and Westpac, cash them free; it will cost you around

### *Tips* Dear Visa: I'm Off to Kununurra!

Some credit card companies recommend that you notify them of any impending trip abroad so that they don't become suspicious when the card is used numerous times in a foreign destination and block your charges. Even if you don't call your credit card company in advance, you can always call the card's toll-free emergency number (see "Fast Facts: Australia," p. 83) if a charge is refused—a good reason to carry the phone number with you. But perhaps the most important lesson here is to carry more than one card with you on your trip; a card might not work for any number of reasons, so having a backup is the smart way to go.

A$5 to A$11 (US$4–US$8.80) to cash checks denominated in foreign currency at most Australian banks.

You can get traveler's checks at almost any bank. **American Express** offers denominations of $20, $50, $100, $500, and (for cardholders only) $1,000. You'll pay a service charge ranging from 1% to 4%. Cardholders can also get American Express traveler's checks over the phone by calling ✆ **800/221-7282;** Amex gold and platinum cardholders who use this number are exempt from the 1% fee.

Visa offers traveler's checks at Citibank locations nationwide, as well as at several other banks. The service charge ranges between 1.5% and 2%; checks come in denominations of $20, $50, $100, $500, and $1,000. Call ✆ **800/732-1322** for information. AAA members can obtain Visa checks for a $9.95 fee (for checks up to $1,500) at most AAA offices or by calling ✆ **866/339-3378. MasterCard** also offers traveler's checks. Call ✆ **800/223-9920** for a location near you.

**Foreign currency traveler's checks** are useful if you're traveling to only one country, or to the Euro zone; they're accepted at locations such as bed-and-breakfasts where U.S. dollar checks may not be, and they minimize the amount of math you have to do at your destination. **American Express, Thomas Cook, Visa,** and **MasterCard** offer foreign currency traveler's checks. You'll pay the rate of exchange at the time of your purchase (so it's a good idea to monitor the rate before you take the plunge), and most companies charge a transaction fee per order (and a shipping fee if you order online).

If you choose to carry traveler's checks, be sure to keep a record of their serial numbers separate from your checks in the event that they are stolen or lost. You'll get a refund faster if you know the numbers.

### CREDIT CARDS

Credit cards are a safe way to carry money; they also provide a convenient record of all your expenses, and they generally offer relatively good exchange rates. You can also withdraw cash advances from your credit cards at banks or ATMs, provided you know your PIN. If you've forgotten yours or didn't even know you had one, call the number on the back of your credit card and ask the bank to send it to you. It usually takes 5 to 7 business days, though some banks will provide the number over the phone if you tell them your mother's maiden name or some other personal information. When you use your credit card abroad, most banks assess a 2% fee above the 1% fee charged by American Express, MasterCard, or Visa for currency conversion on credit charges. But credit cards still may be the smart way to go when you factor in things like exorbitant ATM fees and higher traveler's check exchange rates (and service fees).

Visa and MasterCard are universally accepted in Australia; American Express and Diners Club are considerably less common, and Discover is not used. Always carry a little cash because many merchants will not take cards for purchases under A$15 (US$12) or so.

For tips and telephone numbers to call if your wallet is stolen or lost, go to "Lost & Found" in the "Fast Facts: Australia" section, later in this chapter.

## 7 When to Go

When it is winter in the Northern Hemisphere, Australia is basking in the Southern Hemisphere's summer, and vice versa. Midwinter in Australia is July and August, and the hottest months are November through March. Remember, unlike in the Northern Hemisphere, the farther south you go in Australia, the colder it gets.

**Tips Steer Clear of the Vacation Rush**

Try to avoid Australia from Boxing Day (Dec 26) to the end of January, when Aussies take their summer vacations. In popular seaside holiday spots, hotel rooms and airline seats get scarce as hen's teeth, and it's a rare airline or hotel that will discount full tariffs by even a dollar.

## THE TRAVEL SEASONS

Airfares to Australia offered by U.S. airlines are lowest from mid-April to late August—the best time to visit the Red Centre, the Top End, and the Great Barrier Reef.

**HIGH SEASON** The peak travel season in the most popular parts of Australia is the Aussie winter. In much of the country—Queensland from around Townsville and northward, all of the Top End and the Red Centre, and most of Western Australia—the most pleasant time to travel is April through September, when daytime temperatures are 66° to 88°F (19°–31°C) and it rarely rains. June, July, and August are the busiest months in these parts; you'll need to book accommodations and tours well in advance, and you will pay higher rates then, too.

On the other hand, Australia's summer is a nice time to visit the southern states—New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, Western Australia from Perth to the south, and Tasmania. Even in winter, temperatures rarely dip below freezing, and snow falls only in parts of Tasmania, in the ski fields of Victoria, and in the Snowy Mountains of southern New South Wales.

The best months to visit Australia, I think, are September and October, when it's often warm enough to hit the beach in the southern states, it's cool enough to tour Uluru (Ayers Rock), and the humidity and rains have not come to Cairns and the Top End (although it will be very hot by Oct). And the wildflowers are in full bloom in Western Australia.

**LOW SEASON** October through March (summer) it is just too hot, too humid, or too wet—or all three—to tour the Red Centre, the Top End, and anywhere in Western Australia except Perth and the southwest. The Top End, the Kimberley, and North Queensland, including Cairns, suffer an intensely hot, humid Wet season from November or December through March or April. In the Top End and Kimberley, this is preceded by an even stickier "build-up" in October and November. Some attractions and tour companies close, floodwaters render others off-limits, and hotels drop their rates, often dramatically. So if you decide to travel in these areas at this time—and lots of people do—be prepared to take the heat, the inconvenience of floods, and, in tropical coastal areas, the slight chance of encountering cyclones.

## HOLIDAYS

In addition to the period from December 26 to the end of January, when Aussies take their summer vacations, the 4 days at Easter (from Good Friday to Easter Monday) and all school holidays are very busy, so book ahead. The school year in Australia is broken into four semesters, with 2-week holidays around Easter, the last week of June and the first week of July, and the last week of September and the first week of October. Some states break at slightly different dates. There's a 6-week summer (Christmas) vacation from mid-December to the end of January.

Almost everything shuts down on Good Friday, Christmas Day, and Boxing Day (Dec 26), and much is closed January 1, Easter Sunday, and Easter Monday. Most establishments close until 1pm, if not all day, on Anzac Day (Apr 25), a World War I commemorative day.

Among the major public holidays are: New Year's Day (Jan 1) Australia Day (Jan 26); Labor Day (second Mon in Mar, WA); Eight Hours Day (first Mon in Mar, TAS); Labor Day (second Mon in Mar, VIC); Canberra Day; (third Mon in Mar, ACT); Good Friday; Easter Sunday; Easter Monday; Anzac Day (Apr 25); May Day (first Mon in May, NT); Labour Day (first Mon in May, QLD); Adelaide Cup (third Mon in May, SA); Foundation Day (first Mon in June, WA); Queen's Birthday (second Mon in June, except WA); Royal National Show Day (second or third Wed in Aug, QLD); Queen's Birthday (Mon in late Sept/early Oct, WA); Labour Day (first Mon in Oct, NSW and SA); Melbourne Cup Day (first Tues in Nov, Melbourne); Christmas Day (Dec 25); and Boxing Day (Dec 26). If December 26 falls on a weekend (as in 2004), the following Monday is a holiday.

## AUSTRALIA CALENDAR OF EVENTS

### January

**Sydney Festival.** Highlights of Sydney's visual and performing arts festival are free jazz or classical music concerts held outdoors on 2 Saturday nights near the Royal Botanic Gardens. (Take a picnic and arrive by 4pm to get a place.) Call ✆ **02/8248 6500** or go to www.sydneyfestival.org.au. Three weeks in January.

**Hyundai Hopman Cup,** Perth. Tennis greats from the world's nine top tennis nations battle it out in a 7-day mixed-doubles competition. Contact the booking agent, BOCS Ticketing (✆ **1800/193 300** in Australia, or 08/9484 1133), or check www.hopmancup.com.au. Late December/early January.

**Tamworth Country Music Festival,** Tamworth (459km/285 miles northwest of Sydney), New South Wales. It may look like an Akubra Hat Convention, but this gathering of rural folk and city folk who would like to be rural folk is Australia's biggest country music festival. The Tamworth Information Centre (✆ **02/6755 4300;** www.tamworth.nsw.gov.au) takes bookings.

**Australia Day.** Australia's answer to Fourth of July marks the landing of the First Fleet of convicts at Sydney Cove in 1788. Every town puts on some kind of celebration; in Sydney, there are ferry races and Tall Ships on the harbor, food and wine stalls in Hyde Park, open days at museums and other attractions, and fireworks in the evening. January 26.

### March

**Sydney Gay & Lesbian Mardi Gras.** A month of events, culminating in a spectacular parade of costumed dancers and decorated floats, watched by several hundred thousand onlookers, followed by a giant warehouse party (by invitation only). Contact Sydney Gay & Lesbian Mardi Gras (✆ **02/9568 8600;** www.mardigras.org.au). The parade is usually the last Saturday in February or first Saturday in March.

**XVIII Commonwealth Games, Melbourne.** In 2006, the best athletes in the Commonwealth—71 countries around the world—will meet to battle it out in a contest of elite sports held only every 4 years. The main venue will be the Melbourne Cricket Ground. Tickets are available only by ballot, but there are special arrangements for visitors to Australia from the Commonwealth and other countries. See the Games website, www.commonwealthgames.com.au, for more details. March 15 to March 26, 2006.

**Australian Formula One Grand Prix,** Melbourne. The first Grand Prix of the year on the international FIA Formula One World Championship circuit is

battled out on one of its fastest circuits, in Melbourne. For tickets, contact Ticketmaster at ✆ **13 16 41** (in Australia) or order online at http://cars.grandprix.com.au. Four days in the first or second week of March.

**Australian Surf Life Saving Championships,** Kurrawa Beach, Gold Coast, Queensland. Up to 6,000 bronzed Aussie and international men and women swim, ski paddle, sprint relay, pilot rescue boats, parade past admiring crowds, and resuscitate "drowning" swimmers in front of 10,000 spectators. Contact Surf Life Saving Australia (✆ **02/9130 7370;** www.slsa.asn.au).

### June

**Sydney Film Festival.** World and Australian premieres of Aussie and international movies take place in the State Theatre and other venues. Contact the Sydney Film Festival (✆ **02/9280 0511;** www.sydneyfilmfestival.org). Two weeks from first or second Friday in June.

### August

***Sun-Herald* City to Surf,** Sydney. Fifty thousand Sydneysiders pound the pavement (or walk or wheelchair it) in this 14km (8¾-mile) "fun run" from the city to Bondi Beach, which has been run for the past 35 years. For entry details, call ✆ **1800/555 514** in Australia or visit www.city2surf.sunherald.com.au (from June onward). If slots are available, you can enter the day of the race. The fee is around A$25 (US$20). Second Sunday in August.

### September

**Floriade,** Canberra. A million tulips, daffodils, hyacinths, and other blooms carpet the banks of Canberra's Lake Burley Griffin in stunning themed flowerbed designs at this celebration, which features performing arts and other entertainment. Contact the Canberra Visitors Centre (✆ **1300/554 114** in Australia; www.canberratourism.com.au) or the Floriade team (✆ **02/ 6205 0666;** www.floriadeaustralia.com). Four weeks from the second or third week of September.

**Henley-on-Todd Regatta,** Alice Springs. Sounds sophisticated, doesn't it? It's actually a harum-scarum race down the dry bed of the Todd River in homemade "boats" made from anything you care to name—an old four-wheel-drive chassis, say, or beer cans lashed together. The only rule is the vessel has to look *vaguely* like a boat. Contact the organizers at ✆ **08/8952 4061** or visit www.henleyontodd.com.au. Third Saturday in September.

### October

**Lexmark Indy 300 Carnival,** Surfers Paradise, Queensland. The world's best Indy-car drivers race a street circuit around Surfers Paradise on the glitzy Gold Coast, as part of the international FedEx Championship champ car motor-sport series. Contact Ticketek (✆ **13 19 31** in Australia, or 07/3404 6700; www.ticketek.com), or check the event's website (www.indy.com.au). Four days in mid- or late October.

### November

**Melbourne Cup,** Flemington racecourse. They say the whole nation stops to watch this horse race. That's about right. If you're not actually at the A$3.5-million (US$2.8-million) race, you're glued to the TV—or, well, you're probably not an Australian. Women wear hats to the office, files on desks all over the country make way for a late chicken and champagne lunch, and don't even think about flagging a cab at the 3:20pm race time. For tickets, contact Ticketmaster (✆ **13 16 41** in Australia); for information, visit www.vrc.net.au. First Tuesday in November.

### December

**Sydney-to-Hobart Yacht Race.** Find a cliff-top spot near the Heads to watch the glorious show of spinnakers as 100 or so yachts leave Sydney Harbour for this grueling world-class event. The organizer is the Sydney-based Cruising Yacht Club of Australia (✆ **02/9363 9731;** www.cyca.com.au). Starts December 26.

**New Year's Eve.** Watching the Sydney Harbour Bridge light up with fireworks is a treat. The main show is at 9pm, not midnight, so young kids don't miss out. Pack a picnic and snag a Harbour-side spot by 4pm or even earlier at the best vantage point—Mrs. Macquarie's Chair in the Royal Botanic Gardens.

## 8 Travel Insurance

Check your existing insurance policies and credit card coverage before you buy travel insurance. You may already be covered for lost luggage, canceled tickets, or medical expenses.

The cost of travel insurance varies widely, depending on the cost and length of your trip, your age and health, and the type of trip you're taking, but expect to pay between 5% and 8% of the vacation itself.

**TRIP-CANCELLATION INSURANCE** Trip-cancellation insurance helps you get your money back if you have to back out of a trip, if you have to go home early, or if your travel supplier goes bankrupt. Allowed reasons for cancellation can range from sickness to natural disasters to the State Department declaring your destination unsafe for travel. (Insurers usually won't cover vague fears, though, as many travelers discovered who tried to cancel their trips in Oct 2001 because they were wary of flying.) In this unstable world, trip-cancellation insurance is a good buy if you're getting tickets well in advance—who knows what the state of the world, or of your airline, will be in 9 months? Insurance policy details vary, so read the fine print—and make sure that your airline or cruise line is on the list of carriers covered in case of bankruptcy. A good resource is **"Travel Guard Alerts,"** a list of companies considered high-risk by Travel Guard International (see website below). Protect yourself further by paying for the insurance with a credit card—by law, consumers can get their money back on goods and services not received if they report the loss within 60 days after the charge is listed on their credit card statement.

***Note:*** Many tour operators, particularly those offering trips to remote or high-risk areas, include insurance in the cost of the trip or can arrange insurance policies through a partnering provider, a convenient and often cost-effective way for the traveler to obtain insurance. Make sure the tour company is a reputable one, however: Some experts suggest you avoid buying insurance from the tour or cruise company you're traveling with, saying it's better to buy from a third-party insurer than to put all your money in one place.

For more information, contact one of the following recommended insurers: **Access America** (✆ 866/807-3982; www.accessamerica.com); **Travel Guard International** (✆ 800/826-4919; www.travelguard.com); **Travel Insured International** (✆ 800/243-3174; www.travelinsured.com); and **Travelex Insurance Services** (✆ 888/457-4602; www.travelex-insurance.com).

**MEDICAL INSURANCE** For travel overseas, most health plans (including Medicare and Medicaid) do not provide coverage, and the ones that do often require you to pay for services upfront and reimburse you only after you return

home. Even if your plan does cover overseas treatment, most out-of-country hospitals make you pay your bills upfront and send you a refund only after you've returned home and filed the necessary paperwork with your insurance company. As a safety net, you may want to buy travel medical insurance, particularly if you're traveling to a remote or high-risk area where emergency evacuation is a possible scenario.

Australia's immense distances mean you can sometimes be a long way from a hospital or a doctor. Make sure your policy covers medical evacuation by helicopter or Australia's Royal Flying Doctor Service airlift. (You might well need this if you become sick or injured in the Outback.) One of the most potentially financially ruinous situations arising from getting sick in Australia is evacuation to your home country. Your policy should cover the cost to fly you back home in a stretcher, along with a nurse, should that be necessary. A stretcher takes up three coach-class seats, and you may need extra seats for a nurse and medical equipment.

Australia has a reciprocal medical-care agreement with Great Britain and a limited agreement with Ireland and New Zealand. It covers travelers for medical expenses for immediately necessary treatment in a public hospital (but not evacuation to your home country, ambulances, funerals, and dental care) by Australia's national health system, called Medicare, which is similar to the program by the same name in the United States. It's crucial to buy insurance, though, because medical care in Australia is expensive, and the national health-care system typically covers only 85%, sometimes less, of treatment; you will not be covered for treatment in a private hospital; and evacuation insurance is a must. Most foreign students must take out the Australian government's Overseas Student Health Cover as a condition of entry.

If you require additional medical insurance, try **MEDEX Assistance** (✆ **410/453-6300;** www.medexassist.com) or **Travel Assistance International** (✆ **800/821-2828;** www.travelassistance.com; for general information on services, call the company's Worldwide Assistance Services, Inc., at ✆ **800/777-8710**).

**LOST-LUGGAGE INSURANCE** On domestic flights, checked baggage is covered up to $2,500 per ticketed passenger. On international flights (including U.S. portions of international trips), baggage coverage is limited to approximately $9.07 per pound, up to approximately $635 per checked bag. If you plan to check items more valuable than the standard liability, see if your valuables are covered by your homeowner's policy, get baggage insurance as part of your comprehensive travel-insurance package, or buy Travel Guard's "BagTrak" product. Don't buy insurance at the airport, as it's usually overpriced. Be sure to take any valuables or irreplaceable items with you in your carry-on luggage, as many valuables (including books, money, and electronics) aren't covered by airline policies.

If your luggage is lost, immediately file a lost-luggage claim at the airport, detailing the luggage contents. For most airlines, you must report delayed, damaged, or lost baggage within 4 hours of arrival. The airlines are required to deliver luggage, once found, directly to your house or destination free of charge.

## 9 Health & Safety

### STAYING HEALTHY

You don't have to worry much about health issues on a trip to Australia. Hygiene standards are high, hospitals are modern, and doctors and dentists are well qualified. Because of the continent's size, you can sometimes be a long way from a hospital or a doctor, but help is never far

away, thanks to the Royal Flying Doctor Service. However, standard medical travel insurance may be advisable (see the previous section).

## GENERAL AVAILABILITY OF HEALTH CARE

No vaccinations are needed to enter Australia unless you have been in a yellow fever danger zone—that is, South America or Africa—in the past 6 days.

Australian pharmacists may only fill prescriptions written by Australian doctors, so carry enough medication with you for your trip. Doctors are listed under "M," for "Medical Practitioners," in the Yellow Pages, and most large towns and cities have 24-hour clinics. Failing that, go to the local hospital's emergency room.

Contact the **International Association for Medical Assistance to Travelers** (**IAMAT; ✆ 716/754-4883** in the U.S., or 416/652-0137 in Canada; www.iamat.org) for tips on travel and health concerns in the countries you're visiting and lists of local, English-speaking doctors. The United States **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention** (**✆ 800/311-3435;** www.cdc.gov) provides up-to-date information on health hazards by region or country and offers tips on food safety.

## COMMON AILMENTS

**BUGS, BITES & OTHER WILDLIFE CONCERNS** Snake and spider bites may not be as common as the hair-raising stories you will hear would suggest, but it pays to be wary. Australia's two deadly spiders are the large hairy funnel web and the tiny red-back, which has a distinctive red slash on its back. Snakes are common throughout Australia. You are most likely to see one if you are in the bush or hiking. If you are bitten, keep calm; moving as little as possible may save your life. Demobilize the limb and wrap that whole section of the limb tightly (but not tight enough to restrict blood flow) with a wide cloth or bandage (not a narrow tourniquet). Then send someone to the nearest hospital, where antivenin should be available.

If you go bushwalking (hiking through the bush), check your whole body for ticks, which are common. If you find one, dab it with methylated spirits or some other noxious chemical. Wait for a while, and then gently pull the tick out with tweezers, carefully ensuring that you don't leave its head inside the wound.

Many Aussie marine creatures are deadly. Avoid stingrays, stonefish (which look like stones, so don't walk on underwater "rocks"), lionfish, and puffer fish. Never touch a blue-ringed octopus (it has blue circles all over its body) or a cone shell (a large shellfish shaped like a blunt cone). Marine stingers, or box jellyfish, inhabit the coastal waters of the northern third of the country in summer. Their sting is very painful and can cause heart failure and death. If you are stung, pour vinegar over the affected site immediately—local authorities leave bottles of vinegar on the beach specifically for this purpose. On beaches in Sydney and other areas, you might come across "blue bottles" (which are sometimes also called "stingers" but are not the same as the jellyfish that plague swimmers and divers in the waters farther north). These long-tentacled blue jellyfish (also known as "Portuguese men o' war") inflict a generally harmless but painful sting that can last for hours. Sometimes you'll see warning signs on patrolled beaches. The best remedy if you are stung is to rinse the area in seawater or fresh water to remove any tentacles stuck to the skin. For intense pain, apply heat or cold, whichever feels better. If you experience breathing difficulties or disorientation following a jellyfish sting, seek medical attention immediately.

There are two types of crocodiles in Australia: the freshwater crocodile, which

grows to almost 3m (10 ft.), and the highly dangerous estuarine (or saltwater) crocodile, which reaches 5 to 7m (17–23 ft.). Freshwater crocs are considered harmless; unfortunately, estuarine crocs aren't. They are called "saltwater" crocs but live mostly in freshwater rivers, wetlands, gorges, and billabongs (ponds). They are very dangerous, move at lightning speed, and are invisible even an inch beneath the water; few people survive an attack. *Never* swim in, or stand near the bank of, any river, swamp, or pool in the northern third of Australia, unless you know for certain it's croc-free, and don't swim at beaches near stream or river mouths.

**SUN/ELEMENTS/EXTREME WEATHER EXPOSURE** Australians have the world's highest death rate from skin cancer because of the country's intense sunlight. Limit your exposure to the sun, especially during the first few days of your trip, and from 11am to 3pm in summer and 10am to 2pm in winter. Remember that UV rays reflected off walls, water, and the ground can burn you even when you're not in direct sunlight. Use a broad-spectrum sunscreen with a high protection factor (SPF 30 or higher). Wear a broad-brimmed hat that covers the back of your neck, ears, and face (a baseball cap won't do it), and a long-sleeved shirt. Remember that children need more protection than adults do. Don't even think about traveling without sunglasses, or you'll spend your entire vacation squinting against Australia's "diamond light."

Cyclones occasionally affect tropical areas such as Darwin and Queensland's coastal regions, from about Gladstone north, during January and February, but serious damage is relatively rare.

## WHAT TO DO IF YOU GET SICK AWAY FROM HOME

If you get sick, consider asking your hotel concierge to recommend a local doctor—even his or her own. You can also try the emergency room at a local hospital. Many hospitals also have walk-in clinics for emergency cases that are not life-threatening; you may not get immediate attention, but you won't pay the high price of an emergency room visit. We list hospitals and emergency numbers under "Fast Facts: Australia," p. 83.

If you suffer from a chronic illness, consult your doctor before your departure. For conditions like epilepsy, diabetes, or heart problems, wear a **MedicAlert identification tag** (✆ **888/633-4298;** www.medic

### Avoiding "Economy Class Syndrome"

**Deep vein thrombosis,** or as it's know in the world of flying, "economy-class syndrome," is a blood clot that develops in a deep vein. It's a potentially deadly condition that can be caused by sitting in cramped conditions—such as an airplane cabin—for too long. During a flight (especially a long-haul flight), get up, walk around, and stretch your legs every 60 to 90 minutes to keep your blood flowing. Other preventative measures include frequent flexing of the legs while sitting, drinking lots of water, and avoiding alcohol and sleeping pills. If you have a history of deep vein thrombosis, heart disease, or other conditions that put you at high risk, some experts recommend wearing compression stockings or taking anticoagulants when you fly; always ask your physician about the best course for you. Symptoms of deep vein thrombosis include leg pain or swelling, or even shortness of breath.

alert.org), which will immediately alert doctors to your condition and give them access to your records through MedicAlert's 24-hour hot line.

Pack **prescription medications** in your carry-on luggage and carry prescription medications in their original containers, with pharmacy labels—otherwise they won't make it through airport security. Also bring along copies of your prescriptions in case you lose your pills or run out. Don't forget an extra pair of contact lenses or glasses. Carry the generic name of prescription medicines, in case a local pharmacist is unfamiliar with the brand name.

For domestic trips, most reliable health-care plans provide coverage if you get sick away from home. For travel abroad, you may have to pay all medical costs upfront and be reimbursed later. See "Medical Insurance," under "Travel Insurance," above.

### STAYING SAFE

Driving probably poses one of the greatest risks to visitors to Australia. Australians drive on the left, something that North American and European visitors often have difficulty remembering. Drivers and passengers, including taxi passengers, must wear a seat belt at all times, by law. Avoid driving between dusk and dawn in country areas because this is when kangaroos are most active, and a collision with a 'roo is something to be avoided at all costs. Road trains—as many as three big truck carriages linked together, which can be up to 54m (177 ft.) long—are another danger, particularly in the Outback. ***Warning:*** If you break down or get lost, never leave your vehicle. Most people who get lost do so in Outback spots, and those who wander off to look for help or water usually die in the attempt. If it happens to you, stay with your car. See "Getting Around Australia" on p. 66.

## 10 Specialized Travel Resources

### TRAVELERS WITH DISABILITIES

Most disabilities shouldn't stop anyone from traveling. There are more options and resources out there than ever before.

Most hotels, major stores, attractions, and public restrooms in Australia have wheelchair access. Many smaller lodges and even B&Bs are starting to cater to guests with disabilities, and some diving companies cater to scuba divers with disabilities. National parks make an effort to include wheelchair-friendly pathways, too. Taxi companies in bigger cities can usually supply a cab equipped for wheelchairs. TTY facilities are still limited largely to government services. For information on all kinds of facilities and services (not just travel-related organizations) for people with disabilities, contact **National Information Communication Awareness Network,** P.O. Box 407, Curtin, ACT 2605 (✆ **1800/806 769** voice and TTY in Australia, or 02/6285 3713; www.nican.com.au). This free service can put you in touch with accessible accommodations and attractions throughout Australia, as well as with travel agents and tour operators who understand your needs.

Many travel agencies offer customized tours and itineraries for travelers with disabilities. **Flying Wheels Travel** (✆ **507/451-5005;** www.flyingwheelstravel.com) offers escorted tours and cruises that emphasize sports and private tours in minivans with lifts. **Access-Able Travel Source** (✆ **303/232-2979;** www.accessable.com) offers extensive access information and advice for traveling around the world with disabilities. **Accessible Journeys** (✆ **800/846-4537** or 610/521-0339; www.disabilitytravel.com) caters specifically to slow walkers and wheelchair travelers and their families and friends.

**Avis Rent a Car** has an "Avis Access" program that offers services for customers with special travel needs, such as a dedicated 24-hour toll-free number (✆ **888/879-4273**); special car features such as swivel seats, spinner knobs, and hand controls; and accessible bus service.

Organizations that offer assistance to disabled travelers include **MossRehab** (www.mossresourcenet.org), which provides a library of accessible-travel resources online; **SATH** (Society for Accessible Travel & Hospitality; ✆ **212/447-7284;** www.sath.org; annual membership fees: $45 adults, $30 seniors and students), which offers a wealth of travel resources for all types of disabilities and informed recommendations on destinations, access guides, travel agents, tour operators, vehicle rentals, and companion services; and the **American Foundation for the Blind** (**AFB;** ✆ **800/232-5463;** www.afb.org), a referral resource for the blind or visually impaired that includes information on traveling with Seeing Eye dogs.

For more information specifically targeted to travelers with disabilities, the community website **iCan** (www.icanonline.net/channels/travel/index.cfm) has destination guides and several regular columns on accessible travel. Also check out the quarterly magazine **Emerging Horizons** ($14.95 per year, $19.95 outside the U.S.; www.emerginghorizons.com); and ***Open World*** magazine, published by SATH (see above; subscription: $13 per year, $21 outside the U.S.).

## GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELERS

Sydney is one of the most gay-friendly cities in the world, and across most of Australia, the gay community has a high profile and lots of support services. There are plenty of gay and lesbian bars, and most Saturday nights see a privately operated gay dance party taking place in an inner-city warehouse somewhere. The cafes and pubs of Oxford Street in Darlinghurst, a short cab ride or long stroll from Sydney's downtown area, are the liveliest gay spots. The annual Sydney Gay & Lesbian Mardi Gras, culminating in a huge street parade and party in late February or early March, is a high point on the city's calendar.

In rural areas of Australia, you may still encounter a little conservative resistance to gays and lesbians, but Australians everywhere are generally tolerant. Noosa, on Queensland's Sunshine Coast, is a favored destination for revelers after the Sydney Mardi Gras, and a couple of resorts in north Queensland cater to gay and lesbian travelers. One of the best known is **Turtle Cove Resort** (✆ **1300/727 979** in Australia, or 07/4059 1800; www.turtlecove.com.au), on a private beach between Cairns and Port Douglas.

Some services you may find useful are the **Gay & Lesbian Counselling Service** of NSW (✆ **02/8594 9500** for the administration office), which runs a hot line (✆ **1800/184 527** in Australia, or 02/8594 9596) from 7:30 to 10pm daily. Its website, www.glccs.org.au, has contact information for each state. In Sydney, the **Albion Street Centre** (✆ **02/9332 9600** for administration, 1800/451 600 in Australia outside Sydney, or 02/9332 9700 in Sydney for the information line) is an AIDS clinic and information service.

**The International Gay and Lesbian Travel Association** (**IGLTA;** ✆ **800/448-8550** or 954/776-2626; www.iglta.org) is the trade association for the gay and lesbian travel industry and offers an online directory of gay- and lesbian-friendly travel businesses; go to their website and click on "Members."

Many agencies offer tours and travel itineraries specifically for gay and lesbian travelers. **Above and Beyond Tours** (✆ **800/397-2681;** www.abovebeyondtours.com) is the exclusive gay and lesbian tour operator for United Airlines. **Now, Voyager** (✆ **800/255-6951;** www.nowvoyager.com) is a well-known San Francisco–based gay-owned and -operated

travel service. **Olivia Cruises & Resorts** (✆ **800/631-6277;** www.olivia.com) charters entire resorts and ships for exclusive lesbian vacations and offers smaller group experiences for both gay and lesbian travelers. In 2005, tennis great Martina Navratilova was named Olivia's official spokesperson.

***Fellow Traveller*** (✆ **03/9429 6110;** www.fellowtraveller.com.au), Australia's only free gay and lesbian accommodations guide, is produced annually by Melbourne's weekly gay and lesbian newspaper *MCV.* It is distributed nationally. The following travel guides are available at most travel bookstores and gay and lesbian bookstores or your favorite online bookseller: ***Spartacus International Gay Guide*** (Bruno Gmünder Verlag; www.spartacusworld.com/gayguide) and ***Odysseus: The International Gay Travel Planner*** (Odysseus Enterprises, Ltd.), both good, annual English-language guidebooks focused on gay men; and the ***Damron*** guides (www.damron.com), with separate, annual books for gay men and lesbians.

**Gay.com Travel** (✆ **800/929-2268** or 415/644-8044; www.gay.com/travel or www.outandabout.com) is an online resource that's a successor to the popular ***Out & About*** print magazine. It provides regularly updated information about gay-owned, gay-oriented, and gay-friendly lodging, dining, sightseeing, nightlife, and shopping establishments in every important destination worldwide, and trip-planning information for gay and lesbian travelers for more than 50 destinations and along different themes ranging from Sex & Travel to Vacations for Couples.

## SENIOR TRAVEL

Mention the fact that you're a senior when you make your travel reservations. Although all of the major U.S. airlines except America West have canceled their senior discount and coupon book programs, many hotels still offer discounts for seniors. In most cities, people over the age of 60 qualify for reduced admission to theaters, museums, and other attractions, as well as discounted fares on public transportation.

Seniors—often called "pensioners" in Australia—from other countries don't always qualify for the discounted entry prices to tours, attractions, and events that Australian seniors enjoy, but mostly they do. Always inquire about discounts when booking hotels, flights, and train or bus tickets. The best ID to bring is something that shows your date of birth or something that marks you as an "official" senior.

Many reliable agencies and organizations target the 50-plus market. **Elderhostel** (✆ **877/426-8056;** www.elderhostel.org) arranges study programs for those ages 55 and over (and a spouse or companion of any age) in the U.S. and in more than 80 countries around the world. Most courses last 5 to 7 days in the U.S. (2–4 weeks abroad), and many include airfare, accommodations in university dormitories or modest inns, meals, and tuition. **ElderTreks** (✆ **800/741-7956;** www.eldertreks.com) offers small-group tours to off-the-beaten-path or adventure-travel locations, restricted to travelers 50 and older. Recommended publications offering travel resources and discounts for seniors include: the quarterly magazine ***Travel 50 & Beyond*** (www.travel50andbeyond.com); ***Travel Unlimited: Uncommon Adventures for the Mature Traveler*** (Avalon); ***101 Tips for Mature Travelers,*** available from Grand Circle Travel (✆ **800/221-2610** or 617/350-7500; www.gct.com); and ***Unbelievably Good Deals and Great Adventures That You Absolutely Can't Get Unless You're Over 50*** (McGraw-Hill), by Joann Rattner Heilman.

## FAMILY TRAVEL

If you have enough trouble getting your kids out of the house in the morning, dragging them thousands of miles away may seem like an insurmountable challenge. But family travel can be immensely rewarding, giving you new ways of seeing the world through smaller pairs of eyes.

Australians travel widely with their own kids, so facilities for families, including family passes to attractions, are common.

A great accommodations option for families is Australia's huge stock of serviced or unserviced apartments (with or without daily maid service). Often less expensive than a hotel room, they offer a living room, a kitchen, a bathroom or two, and the privacy of a separate bedroom for adults. "Tips on Accommodations," later in this chapter, has details on the major apartment chains. Most Australian hotels will arrange babysitting given a day's notice.

International airlines and domestic airlines in Australia charge 75% of the adult fare for kids under 12. Most charge 10% for infants under 2 not occupying a seat. Australian transport companies, attractions, and tour operators typically charge half price for kids under 12 or 14 years.

Many Australian resorts have "kids' clubs" with extensive programs designed for under-12s and, in some cases, teenagers. The French-owned Accor chain of hotels and resorts, which is Australia's largest chain, has kids' clubs, kids' menus designed by a nutritionist (and not just the same boring fodder you get everywhere else), and other family-friendly facilities including family rooms. Other resorts, such as Hamilton Island, have "kids stay, eat, and play free" offers, particularly during holiday periods. Many hotels will offer connecting units or "family rooms." Ask when booking, and look out for our "kids" icon in this book.

Don't forget that children entering Australia on their parent's passport still need their own visa. See "Entry Requirements," earlier in this chapter.

**Familyhostel** (✆ **800/733-9753;** www.learn.unh.edu/familyhostel) takes the whole family, including kids ages 8 to 15, on moderately priced domestic and international learning vacations. Lectures, fields trips, and sightseeing are guided by a team of academics.

Recommended family travel Internet sites include **Family Travel Forum** (www.familytravelforum.com), a comprehensive site that offers customized trip planning; **Family Travel Network** (www.familytravelnetwork.com), an award-winning site that offers travel features, deals, and tips; **Traveling Internationally with Your Kids** (www.travelwithyourkids.com), a comprehensive site offering sound advice for long-distance and international travel with children; and **Family Travel Files** (www.thefamilytravelfiles.com), which offers an online magazine and a directory of off-the-beaten-path tours and tour operators for families.

## STUDENT TRAVEL

If you're planning to travel to Australia, you'd be wise to arm yourself with an **International Student Identity Card (ISIC),** which offers substantial savings on rail passes, plane tickets, and entrance fees. It also provides you with basic health and life insurance and a 24-hour help line. The card is available for $22 from **STA Travel** (✆ **800/781-4040,** and outside North America there's probably a local number in your country; www.sta.com or www.statravel.com), the biggest student travel agency in the world. If you're no longer a student but are under 26, you can get a **International Youth Travel Card (IYTC)** for the same price from the same people, which entitles you to some discounts (but not on museum admissions). (***Note:*** In 2002, STA Travel bought competitors **Council Travel** and **USIT Campus** after they went bankrupt. It's still operating some offices under the

Council name, but it's owned by STA.) **Travel CUTS** (✆ **800/667-2887** or 416/614-2887; www.travelcuts.com) offers similar services for both Canadians and U.S. residents. Irish students may prefer to turn to **USIT** (✆ **01/602-1600;** www.usitnow.ie), an Ireland-based specialist in student, youth, and independent travel.

### SINGLE TRAVELERS

Single travelers are often hit with a "single supplement" to the base price. To avoid it, you can agree to room with other single travelers on the trip, or you can find a compatible roommate before you go from one of the many roommate-locator agencies. **Travel Buddies Singles Travel Club** (✆ **800/998-9099;** www.travelbuddiesworldwide.com), based in Canada, runs small, intimate, single-friendly group trips and will match you with a roommate free of charge. **TravelChums** (✆ **212/787-2621;** www.travelchums.com) is an Internet-only travel-companion matching service with elements of an online personals-type site, hosted by the respected New York–based Shaw Guides travel service. Many reputable tour companies offer singles-only trips. **Backroads** (✆ **800/462-2848;** www.backroads.com) offers more than 160 active-travel trips to 30 destinations worldwide, including Australia.

For more information, check out the latest edition of Eleanor Berman's ***Traveling Solo: Advice and Ideas for More Than 250 Great Vacations*** (Globe Pequot), a guide with advice on traveling alone, whether on your own or on a group tour.

## 11 Planning Your Trip Online

### SURFING FOR AIRFARES

The "big three" online travel agencies, **Expedia.com, Travelocity.com,** and **Orbitz.com** sell most of the air tickets bought on the Internet. (Canadian travelers should try expedia.ca and Travelocity.ca; U.K. residents can go for expedia.co.uk and opodo.co.uk.). Each has different business deals with the airlines and may offer different fares on the same flights, so it's wise to shop around. Expedia and Travelocity will also send you **e-mail notification** when a cheap fare becomes available to your favorite destination. Of the smaller travel agency websites, **SideStep** (www.sidestep.com) has gotten the best reviews from Frommer's authors. It's a browser add-on that purports to "search 140 sites at once," but in reality only beats competitors' fares as often as other sites do.

Also remember to check **airline websites,** especially those for low-fare carriers such as Southwest, JetBlue, AirTran, WestJet, or Ryanair, whose fares are often misreported or simply missing from travel agency websites. Even with major airlines, you can often shave a few bucks from a fare by booking directly through the airline and avoiding a travel agency's transaction fee. But you'll get these discounts only by **booking online:** Most airlines now offer online-only fares that even their phone agents know nothing about. For the websites of airlines that fly to and from Australia, go to "Getting There," p. 53.

Great **last-minute deals** are available through free weekly e-mail services provided directly by the airlines. Most of these are announced on Tuesday or Wednesday and must be purchased online. Most are only valid for travel that weekend, but some (such as Southwest's) can be booked weeks or months in advance. Sign up for weekly e-mail alerts at airline websites or check mega-sites that compile comprehensive lists of last-minute specials, such as **SmarterTravel.com** (www.smartertravel.com). For last-minute trips, **site59.com** and **lastminutetravel.com** in the U.S. and **lastminute.com** in Europe often have better air-and-hotel package deals than the major-label

sites. A website listing numerous bargain sites and airlines around the world is **www.itravelnet.com**.

If you're willing to give up some control over your flight details, use what is called an **"opaque" fare service** like **Priceline** (www.priceline.com; www.priceline.co.uk for Europeans) or its smaller competitor **Hotwire** (www.hotwire.com). Both offer rock-bottom prices in exchange for travel on a "mystery airline" at a mysterious time of day, often with a mysterious change of planes en route. The mystery airlines are all major, well-known carriers—and the possibility of being sent from Philadelphia to Chicago via Tampa is remote; the airlines' routing computers have gotten a lot better than they used to be. But your chances of getting a 6am or 11pm flight are pretty high. Hotwire tells you flight prices before you buy; Priceline usually has better deals than Hotwire, but you have to play their "name our price" game. If you're new at this, the helpful folks at **BiddingForTravel** (www.biddingfortravel.com) do a good job of demystifying Priceline's prices and strategies. Priceline and Hotwire are great for flights within North America and between the U.S. and Europe. But for flights to other parts of the world, consolidators will almost always beat their fares.

***Note:*** Priceline now offers non-opaque fares as well as its original bidding concept. You now have the option to pick exact flights, times, and airlines from a list of offers—or opt to bid on opaque fares as before.

For much more about airfares and savvy air-travel tips and advice, pick up a copy of ***Frommer's Fly Safe, Fly Smart*** (Wiley Publishing, Inc.).

## SURFING FOR HOTELS

Shopping online for hotels is generally done one of two ways: by booking through the hotel's own website or through an independent booking agency (or a fare-service agency like Priceline; see below). These Internet hotel agencies have multiplied in mind-boggling numbers of late, competing for the business of millions of consumers surfing for accommodations around the world. This competitiveness can be a boon to consumers who have the patience and time to shop and compare the online sites for good deals—but shop they must, for prices can vary considerably from site to site. And keep in mind that hotels at the top of a site's listing may be there for no other reason than that they paid money to get the placement.

Of the "big three" sites, **Expedia** offers a long list of special deals and "virtual tours" or photos of available rooms so you can see what you're paying for (a feature that helps counter the claims that the best rooms are often held back from bargain-booking websites). **Travelocity** posts unvarnished customer reviews and ranks its properties according to the AAA rating system. Also reliable are **Hotels.com** and **Quikbook.com**. An excellent free program, **TravelAxe** (www.travelaxe.net), can help you search multiple hotel sites at once, even ones you may never have heard of—and conveniently lists the total price of the room, including the taxes and service charges. Another booking site, **Travelweb** (www.travelweb.com), is partly owned by the hotels it represents (including the Hilton, Hyatt, and Starwood chains) and is therefore plugged directly into the hotels' reservations systems—unlike independent online agencies, which have to fax or e-mail reservation requests to the hotel, a good portion of which get misplaced in the shuffle. More than once, travelers have arrived at the hotel, only to be told that they have no reservation. To be fair, many of the major sites are undergoing improvements in service and ease of use, and Expedia will soon be able to plug directly into the reservations systems of many hotel chains—none of which can be bad news for consumers. In the meantime, it's a good

### Frommers.com: The Complete Travel Resource

For an excellent travel-planning resource, we highly recommend **Frommers.com** (www.frommers.com), voted Best Travel Site by *PC Magazine.* We're a little biased, of course, but we guarantee that you'll find the travel tips, reviews, monthly vacation giveaways, bookstore, and online-booking capabilities thoroughly indispensable. Among the special features are our popular **Destinations** section, where you'll get expert travel tips, hotel and dining recommendations, and advice on the sights to see for more than 3,500 destinations around the globe; the **Frommers.com Newsletter,** with the latest deals, travel trends, and money-saving secrets; our **Community** area featuring **Message Boards,** where Frommer's readers post queries and share advice (sometimes even our authors show up to answer questions); and our **Photo Center,** where you can post and share vacation tips. When your research is done, the **Online Reservations System** (www.frommers.com/book_a_trip) takes you to Frommer's preferred online partners for booking your vacation at affordable prices.

idea to **get a confirmation number** and **make a printout** of any online booking transaction.

In the opaque website category, **Priceline** and **Hotwire** are even better for hotels than for airfares; with both, you're allowed to pick the neighborhood and quality level of your hotel before offering up your money. Priceline's hotel product even covers Europe and Asia, though it's much better at getting five-star lodging for three-star prices than at finding anything at the bottom of the scale. On the down side, many hotels stick Priceline guests in their least desirable rooms. Be sure to go to the BiddingForTravel website (see above) before bidding on a hotel room on Priceline; it features a fairly up-to-date list of hotels that Priceline uses in major cities. For both Priceline and Hotwire, you pay upfront, and the fee is nonrefundable. ***Note:*** Some hotels do not provide loyalty program credits or points, or other frequent-stay amenities when you book a room through opaque online services.

## SURFING FOR RENTAL CARS

For booking rental cars online, the best deals are usually found at rental-car company websites, although all the major online travel agencies also offer rental-car reservations services. Priceline and Hotwire work well for rental cars, too; the only "mystery" is which major rental company you get, and for most travelers the difference between Hertz, Avis, and Budget is negligible.

# 12 The 21st-Century Traveler

## INTERNET ACCESS AWAY FROM HOME

Travelers have any number of ways to check their e-mail and access the Internet on the road. Of course, using your own laptop—or even a PDA (personal digital assistant) or electronic organizer with a modem—gives you the most flexibility. But even if you don't have a computer, you can still access your e-mail and even your office computer from cybercafes.

### WITHOUT YOUR OWN COMPUTER

It's hard nowadays to find a city that *doesn't* have a few cybercafes, and that's certainly the case in Australia. Although there's no definitive directory for cybercafes—these are independent businesses, after all—two places to start looking are at **www.cybercaptive.com** and **www.cybercafe.com**. In major tourist cities like Cairns and Darwin, there are whole streets full of cybercafes. Aside from formal cybercafes, most **youth hostels** nowadays have at least one computer with Internet access. And most **public libraries** offer Internet access free or for a small charge. Avoid **hotel business centers** unless you're willing to pay exorbitant rates.

Most major airports now have **Internet kiosks** scattered throughout their gates. These kiosks, which you'll also see in shopping malls, hotel lobbies, and tourist information offices around the world, give you basic Web access for a per-minute fee that's usually higher than cybercafe prices. The kiosks' clunkiness and high price mean they should be avoided whenever possible.

To retrieve your e-mail, ask your **Internet Service Provider (ISP)** if it has a Web-based interface tied to your existing e-mail account. If your ISP doesn't have such an interface, you can use the free **mail2web** service (www.mail2web.com) to view and reply to your home e-mail. For more flexibility, you may want to open a free, Web-based e-mail account with **Yahoo! Mail** (http://mail.yahoo.com). (Microsoft's Hotmail is another popular option, but Hotmail has severe spam problems.) Your home ISP may be able to forward your e-mail to the Web-based account automatically.

If you need to access files on your office computer, look into a service called **GoToMyPC** (www.gotomypc.com). The service provides a Web-based interface for you to access and manipulate a distant PC from anywhere—even a cybercafe—provided your "target" PC is on and has an always-on connection to the Internet (such as with Road Runner cable). The service offers top-quality security, but if you're worried about hackers, use your own laptop rather than a cybercafe computer to access the GoToMyPC system.

### WITH YOUR OWN COMPUTER

Wi-Fi (wireless fidelity) is the buzzword in computer access, and more and more hotels, cafes, and retailers are signing on as wireless "hotspots" from where you can get high-speed connection without cable wires, networking hardware, or a phone line (see below). You can get Wi-Fi connection one of several ways. Many laptops sold in the last year have built-in Wi-Fi capability (an 802.11b wireless Ethernet connection). Mac owners have their own networking technology, Apple AirPort. For those with older computers, an 802.11b/**Wi-Fi card** (around $50) can be plugged into your laptop. You sign up for wireless access service much as you do cellphone service, through a plan offered by one of several commercial companies that have made wireless service available in airports, hotel lobbies, and coffee shops, primarily in the U.S. (followed by the U.K. and Japan). iPass providers (see below) also give you access to a few hundred wireless hotel lobby setups. Best of all, you don't need to be staying at the Four Seasons to use the hotel's network; just set yourself up on a nice couch in the lobby. The companies' pricing policies can be byzantine, with a variety of monthly, per-connection, and per-minute plans, but in general you pay around $30 a month for limited access—and as more and more companies jump on the wireless bandwagon, prices are likely to get even more competitive.

There are also places that provide **free wireless networks** in cities around the world. To locate these free hotspots, go

to **www.personaltelco.net/index.cgi/WirelessCommunities**.

Most business-class hotels in Australia offer dataports for laptop modems. **Call your hotel in advance** to see what your options are.

In addition, major Internet service providers (ISPs) have **local access numbers** around the world, allowing you to go online by simply placing a local call. Check your ISP's website or call its toll-free number and ask how you can use your current account away from home, and how much it will cost.

If you're traveling outside the reach of your ISP, the **iPass** network has dial-up numbers in most of the world's countries, including Australia. You'll have to sign up with an iPass provider, who will then tell you how to set up your computer for your destination(s). For a list of iPass providers, go to www.ipass.com and click on "Individuals Buy Now." One solid provider is **i2roam** (✆ **866/811-6209** or 920/235-0475; www.i2roam.com).

Wherever you go, bring a **connection kit** of the right power and phone adapters, a spare phone cord, and a spare Ethernet network cable—or find out whether your hotel supplies them to guests. Australia's electricity supply is 240 volts, 50 Hz. North Americans and Europeans will need to buy a converter before they leave home because Australian stores usually only stock converters for Aussie appliances to fit American and European outlets.

## USING A CELLPHONE IN AUSTRALIA

The three letters that define much of the world's **wireless capabilities** are GSM (Global System for Mobiles), a big, seamless network that makes for easy cross-border cellphone use throughout Europe and dozens of other countries worldwide. In the U.S., T-Mobile, AT&T Wireless, and Cingular use this quasi-universal system; in Canada, Microcell and some Rogers customers are GSM, and all Europeans and most Australians use GSM.

If your cellphone is on a GSM system and you have a world-capable multiband phone such as many Sony Ericsson, Motorola, or Samsung models, you can make and receive calls across civilized areas on much of the globe. Just call your wireless operator and ask for "international roaming" to be activated on your account. Unfortunately, per-minute charges can be high.

That's why it's important to buy an "unlocked" world phone from the get-go. Many cellphone operators sell "locked" phones that restrict you from using any removable computer memory phone chip card (called a **SIM card**) other than the ones they supply. Having an unlocked phone allows you to install a cheap, prepaid SIM card (found at a local retailer) in your destination country. (Show your phone to the salesperson; not all phones work on all networks.) You'll get a local phone number—and much, much lower calling rates. Getting an already locked phone unlocked can be a complicated process, but it can be done; just call your cellular operator and say you'll be going abroad for several months and want to use the phone with a local provider.

For many, **renting** a phone is a good idea. While you can rent a phone from any number of overseas sites, including kiosks at airports and at car-rental agencies, we suggest renting the phone before you leave home. That way you can give loved ones and business associates your new number, make sure the phone works, and take the phone wherever you go—especially helpful for overseas trips through several countries, where local phone-rental agencies often bill in local currency and may not let you take the phone to another country.

Phone rental isn't cheap. You'll usually pay $40 to $50 per week, plus airtime fees of at least a dollar a minute. If you're

traveling to Europe, though, local rental companies often offer free incoming calls within their home country, which can save you big bucks. The bottom line: Shop around.

In Australia—reputed to have one of the world's highest per-capita rates of ownership of "mobile" telephones, as they are known here—they are available for daily rental at major airports and in big cities, and increasingly from car- and motor-home-rental companies. The cell network is digital, not analog. Calls to or from a mobile telephone are generally more expensive than calls to or from a fixed telephone—A60¢ (US50¢) a minute is a ballpark guide, although the price varies depending on the telephone company, the time of day, the distance between caller and recipient, and the telephone's pricing plan.

Australian mobile phone company **Vodafone** (www.vodarent.com.au) has outlets at Brisbane, Cairns, Perth, and Melbourne international airports; Sydney international and domestic airports; and a store in Surfers Paradise on the Gold Coast. They cost A$6 to A$10 (US$4.80–US$8) a day, plus call charges and insurance, depending on the kind of phone and coverage you want. You can rent a SIM card for A$1 (US80¢) a day.

Two good wireless rental companies are **InTouch USA** (✆ **800/872-7626;** www.intouchglobal.com) and **RoadPost** (✆ **888/290-1606** or 905/272-5665; www.roadpost.com). Give them your itinerary, and they'll tell you what wireless products you need. InTouch will also, for free, advise you on whether your existing phone will work overseas; simply call ✆ **703/222-7161** between 9am and 4pm EST or go to http://intouchglobal.com/travel.htm.

For trips of more than a few weeks spent in one country, **buying a phone** becomes economically attractive, as many nations have cheap, no-questions-asked prepaid phone systems. Once you arrive at your destination, stop by a local cellphone shop and get the cheapest package; you'll probably pay less than $100 for a phone and a starter calling card. Local calls may be as low as 10¢ per minute, and in many countries incoming calls are free.

True wilderness adventurers, or those heading to less-developed countries, should consider renting a **satellite phone**

### Tips Digital Photography on the Road

Many travelers are going digital these days when it comes to taking vacation photographs. Not only are digital cameras left relatively unscathed by airport X-rays, but with digital equipment you don't need to lug armloads of film with you as you travel. In fact, nowadays you don't even need to carry your laptop to download the day's images to make room for more. With a **media storage card,** sold by all major camera dealers, you can store hundreds of images in your camera. These "memory" cards come in different configurations—from memory sticks to flash cards to secure digital cards—and different storage capacities (the more megabytes of memory, the more images a card can hold) and range in price from $30 to over $200. (***Note:*** Each camera model works with a specific type of card, so you'll need to determine which storage card is compatible with your camera.) When you get home, you can print the images out on your own color printer or take the storage card to a camera store, drugstore, or chain retailer. Or have the images developed online with a service like **Snapfish** (www.snapfish.com) for something like 25¢ a shot.

### Online Traveler's Toolbox

Veteran travelers usually carry some essential items to make their trips easier. Following is a selection of handy online tools to bookmark and use.

- **Intellicast** (www.intellicast.com) and **Weather.com** (www.weather.com). Gives weather forecasts for all 50 states and for cities around the world.
- **Mapquest** (www.mapquest.com). This best of the mapping sites lets you choose a specific address or destination, and in seconds, it will return a map and detailed directions.
- **Time and Date** (www.timeanddate.com). See what time (and day) it is anywhere in the world.
- **Travel Warnings** (http://travel.state.gov, www.fco.gov.uk/travel, www.voyage.gc.ca, www.dfat.gov.au/consular/advice, or www.smartraveller.gov.au). These sites report on places where health concerns or unrest might threaten American, British, Canadian, and Australian travelers. Generally, U.S. warnings are the most paranoid; Australian warnings are the most relaxed.
- **Universal Currency Converter** (www.xe.com/ucc). See what your dollar or pound is worth in more than 100 other countries.
- **Visa ATM Locator** (www.visa.com), for locations of PLUS ATMs worldwide, or **MasterCard ATM Locator** (www.mastercard.com), for locations of Cirrus ATMs worldwide.

**("satphone"),** which is different from a cellphone in that it connects to satellites rather than ground-based towers. A satphone is more costly than a cellphone but works where there's no cellular signal and no towers. You can rent satellite phones from **RoadPost** (✆ **888/290-1606** or 905/272-5665; www.roadpost.com). InTouch USA (see above) offers a wider range of satphones but at higher rates. Per-minute call charges can be even cheaper than roaming charges with a regular cellphone, but the phone itself is more expensive (up to $150 a week), and depending on the service you choose, people calling you may incur high long-distance charges. As of this writing, satphones were amazingly expensive to buy, so don't even think about it.

## 13 Getting There

### BY PLANE

Australia is a long, long haul from anywhere except New Zealand. Sydney is a nearly 15-hour nonstop flight from Los Angeles, longer if you come via Honolulu. From the east coast, add 5½ hours. If you're coming from the States via Auckland, add transit time in New Zealand plus another 3 hours for the Auckland-Sydney leg. If you are coming from the United Kingdom, brace yourself for a flight of 12 hours, more or less, from London to Asia; then possibly a long day in transit because flights to Australia have a habit of arriving in Asia early in the morning and departing around midnight; and finally the 8- to 9-hour flight to Australia.

Sydney, Cairns, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide, Darwin, and Perth are all international gateways, but most airlines fly

only into Sydney. A few fly to Melbourne and Brisbane.

## THE MAJOR CARRIERS

Here are toll-free reservations numbers and websites for the major international airlines serving Australia. The "13" prefix in Australia means that the number incurs the same cost as a local call from anywhere in the country.

### CARRIERS FLYING FROM NORTH AMERICA

- **Air Canada** (✆ **888/247-2262** in the U.S. and Canada, 02/8248 5757 in Sydney, or 1300/655 767 from elsewhere in Australia; www.aircanada.com)
- **Air New Zealand** (✆ **800/262-1234** in the U.S., 310/615-1111 in the Los Angeles area, 800/663-5494 in Canada, or 13 24 76 in Australia; www.airnewzealand.com)
- **Qantas** (✆ **800/227-4500** in the U.S. and Canada, or 13 13 13 in Australia; www.qantas.com.au)
- **United Airlines** (✆ **800/538-2929** in the U.S. and Canada, or 13 17 77 in Australia; www.united.com or www.united.ca)

### CARRIERS FLYING FROM THE UNITED KINGDOM

- **British Airways** (✆ **0870/850 9850** in the U.K., 1890/626 747 in Ireland, or 1300/767 177 in Australia; www.britishairways.com)
- **Cathay Pacific** (✆ **020/8834 8888** in the U.K., or 13 17 47 in Australia; www.cathaypacific.com/uk)
- **Malaysia Airlines** (✆ **0870/607 9090** in the U.K. and Ireland, or 13 26 27 in Australia; www.malaysiaairlines.com.my or www.malaysiaairlineseurope.com)
- **Qantas** (✆ **0845/774 7767** in the U.K., or 13 13 13 in Australia; www.qantas.com.au)
- **Singapore Airlines** (✆ **0870/608 8886** in the U.K., or 13 10 11 in Australia; www.singaporeair.com/uk)
- **Thai Airways International** (✆ **0870/6060 911** in the U.K., or 1300/651 960 in Australia; www.thaiair.com)

## GETTING THROUGH THE AIRPORT

With the federalization of airport security, security procedures at U.S. airports are more stable and consistent than ever. Generally, you'll be fine if you arrive at the airport **1 hour** before a domestic flight and **2 hours** before an international flight; if you show up late, tell an airline employee and she'll probably whisk you to the front of the line.

Bring a **current, government-issued photo ID** such as a driver's license or passport. Keep your ID at the ready to show at check-in, the security checkpoint, and sometimes even the gate. (Children under 18 do not need government-issued photo IDs for domestic flights, but they do for international flights to most countries, including Australia.)

In 2003, the TSA phased out **gate check-in** at all U.S. airports. And **e-tickets** have made paper tickets nearly obsolete. Passengers with e-tickets can beat the ticket-counter lines by using airport **electronic kiosks** or even **online check-in** from your home computer. Online check-in involves logging on to your airline's website, accessing your reservation, and printing out your boarding pass—and the airline may even offer you bonus miles to do so! If you're using a kiosk at the airport, bring the credit card you used to book the ticket or your frequent-flier card. Print out your boarding pass from the kiosk and simply proceed to the security checkpoint with your pass and a photo ID. If you're checking bags or looking to snag an exit-row seat, you will be able to do so using most airline kiosks. Even the smaller airlines are employing

the kiosk system, but always call your airline to make sure these alternatives are available. **Curbside check-in** is also a good way to avoid lines, although a few airlines still ban curbside check-in; call before you go.

Security checkpoint lines are getting shorter than they were during 2001 and 2002, but some doozies remain. If you have trouble standing for long periods of time, tell an airline employee; the airline will provide a wheelchair. Speed up security by **not wearing metal objects** such as big belt buckles. If you've got metallic body parts, a note from your doctor can prevent a long chat with the security screeners. Keep in mind that only **ticketed passengers** are allowed past security, except for folks escorting disabled passengers or children.

Federalization has stabilized **what you can carry on** and **what you can't.** The general rule is that sharp things are out. Nail clippers may be on U.S. domestic flights, but in Australia you will have them confiscated. Food and beverages must be passed through the X-ray machine—but security screeners can't make you drink from your coffee cup. Bring food in your carry-on rather than checking it, as explosive-detection machines used on checked luggage have been known to mistake food (especially chocolate, for some reason) for bombs. Travelers in the U.S. are allowed one carry-on bag, plus a "personal item" such as a purse, briefcase, or laptop bag. Carry-on hoarders can stuff all sorts of things into a laptop bag; as long as it has a laptop in it, it's still considered a personal item. The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) has issued a list of restricted items; check its website (www.tsa.gov/public/index.jsp) for details.

Airport screeners may decide that your checked luggage needs to be searched by hand. You can now purchase luggage locks that allow screeners to open and relock a checked bag if hand-searching is necessary. Look for Travel Sentry certified locks at luggage or travel shops and Brookstone stores (you can buy them online at www.brookstone.com). These locks, approved by the TSA, can be opened by luggage inspectors with a special code or key. For more information on the locks, visit www.travelsentry.org. If you use something other than TSA-approved locks, your lock will be cut off your suitcase if a TSA agent needs to hand-search your luggage.

## FLYING FOR LESS: TIPS FOR GETTING THE BEST AIRFARE

Passengers sharing the same airplane cabin rarely pay the same fare. Travelers who need to purchase tickets at the last minute, change their itinerary at a moment's notice, or fly one-way often get stuck paying the premium rate. Here are some ways to keep your airfare costs down.

- Passengers who can book their ticket **long in advance,** who can **stay over Saturday night,** or who **fly midweek** or **at less-trafficked hours** may pay a fraction of the full fare. If your schedule is flexible, say so, and ask if you can secure a cheaper fare by changing your flight plans.
- You can also save on airfares by keeping an eye out in local newspapers for **promotional specials** or **fare wars,** when airlines lower prices on their most popular routes. You rarely see fare wars offered for peak travel times, but if you can travel in the off-months, you may snag a bargain.
- Search **the Internet** for cheap fares (see "Planning Your Trip Online," earlier in this chapter).
- Try to book a ticket **in its country of origin.** For instance, if you're planning a one-way flight from Sydney to Auckland, an Australia-based travel agent such as Flight Centres will probably have the lowest fares. For multileg trips, book in the country of

the first leg; for example, book Melbourne-Auckland–Los Angeles in Australia.

- **Consolidators,** also known as bucket shops, are great sources for international tickets, although they usually can't beat the Internet on fares within North America. Start by looking in Sunday newspaper travel sections; U.S. travelers should focus on the *New York Times, Los Angeles Times,* and *Miami Herald.* ***Beware:*** Bucket shop tickets are usually nonrefundable or rigged with stiff cancellation penalties, often as high as 50% to 75% of the ticket price, and some put you on charter airlines, which may leave at inconvenient times and experience delays. Several reliable consolidators are worldwide and available on the Net. **STA Travel** (✆ **800/781-4040**) is now the world's leader in student travel, thanks to their purchase of Council Travel. It also offers good fares for travelers of all ages. **ELTExpress (Flights.com)** (✆ **800/TRAV-800;** www.eltexpress.com) started in Europe and has excellent fares worldwide, but particularly to that continent. It also has "local" websites in 12 countries. **FlyCheap** (✆ **800/FLY-CHEAP;** www.1800flycheap.com) is owned by package-holiday megalith MyTravel and so has especially good access to fares for sunny destinations. **Air Tickets Direct** (✆ **800/778-3447;** www.airticketsdirect.com) is based in Montreal and leverages the currently weak Canadian dollar for low fares.
- Join **frequent-flier clubs.** Accrue enough miles, and you'll be rewarded with free flights and elite status. It's free, and you'll get the best choice of seats, faster response to phone inquiries, and prompter service if your luggage is stolen, your flight is canceled or delayed, or if you want to change your seat. You don't need to fly to build frequent-flier miles—**frequent-flier credit cards** can provide thousands of miles for doing your everyday shopping.
- For many more tips about air travel, including a rundown of the major frequent-flier credit cards, pick up a copy of ***Frommer's Fly Safe, Fly Smart*** (Wiley Publishing, Inc.).

## LONG-HAUL FLIGHTS: HOW TO STAY COMFORTABLE

Long flights can be trying; stuffy air and cramped seats can make you feel as if you're being sent parcel post in a small box. But with a little advance planning, you can make an otherwise unpleasant experience almost bearable.

- Your choice of airline and airplane will definitely affect your leg room. Find more details at www.seatguru.

### Travel in the Age of Bankruptcy

Airlines go bankrupt, so protect yourself by **buying your tickets with a credit card,** as the Fair Credit Billing Act guarantees that you can get your money back from the credit card company if a travel supplier goes under (and if you request the refund within 60 days of the bankruptcy.) **Travel insurance** can also help, but make sure it covers against "carrier default" for your specific travel provider. And be aware that if a U.S. airline goes bust mid-trip, a 2001 federal law requires other carriers to take you to your destination (albeit on a space-available basis) for a fee of no more than $25, provided you rebook within 60 days of the cancellation.

### Tips Coping with Jet Lag

Jet lag is a pitfall of traveling across time zones. If you're flying north-south and you feel sluggish when you touch down, your symptoms will be caused by dehydration and the general stress of air travel. When you travel east to west or vice versa, however, your body becomes thoroughly confused about what time it is, and everything from your digestion to your brain gets knocked for a loop. Traveling east, say, from Chicago to Paris, is more difficult on your internal clock than traveling west, say from Atlanta to Hawaii, as most peoples' bodies find it more acceptable to stay up late than to fall asleep early.

Here are some tips for combating jet lag:

- **Reset your watch** to your destination time before you board the plane.
- **Drink lots of water** before, during, and after your flight. Avoid alcohol.
- **Exercise and sleep well** for a few days before your trip.
- If you have trouble sleeping on planes, **fly eastward on morning flights.**
- **Daylight** is the key to resetting your body clock. At the website for **Outside In** (www.bodyclock.com), you can get a customized plan of when to seek and avoid light.
- If you need help getting to sleep earlier than you usually would, some doctors recommend taking either the hormone **melatonin** or the sleeping pill **Ambien**—but not together. Some recommend that you take 2 to 5 milligrams of melatonin about 2 hours before your planned bedtime—but again, always check with your doctor on the best course of action for you.

com, which has extensive details about almost every seat on six major U.S. airlines. For international airlines, research firm Skytrax has posted a list of average seat pitches at www.airlinequality.com.

- Emergency-exit seats and bulkhead seats typically have the most legroom. Emergency-exit seats are usually held back to be assigned the day of a flight (to ensure that the seat is filled by someone able-bodied); it's worth getting to the ticket counter early to snag one of these spots for a long flight. Many passengers find that bulkhead seating (the row facing the wall at the front of the cabin) offers more legroom, but keep in mind that bulkheads are where airlines often put baby bassinets, so you may be sitting next to an infant.
- To have two seats for yourself in a three-seat row, try for an aisle seat in a center section toward the back of coach. If you're traveling with a companion, book an aisle and a window seat. Middle seats are usually booked last, so chances are good you'll end up with three seats to yourselves. And in the event that a third passenger is assigned the middle seat, he or she will probably be more than happy to trade for a window or an aisle.
- Ask about entertainment options. Many airlines offer seatback video systems where you get to choose your movies or play video games—but only on some of their planes. (Boeing 777s are your best bet.)
- To sleep, avoid the last row of any section or a row in front of an emergency exit, as these seats are the least likely to recline. Avoid seats near highly trafficked toilet areas. Avoid seats in the back of many jets—these can be narrower than those in the rest

of coach class. You also may want to reserve a window seat so that you can rest your head and avoid being bumped in the aisle.

- Get up, walk around, and stretch every 60 to 90 minutes to keep your blood flowing. This helps avoid **deep vein thrombosis,** or "economy-class syndrome," a potentially deadly condition that can be caused by sitting in cramped conditions for too long. Other preventative measures include drinking lots of water and avoiding alcohol (see next bullet). See the "Avoiding 'Economy Class Syndrome'" box, p. 42.
- Drink water before, during, and after your flight to combat the lack of humidity in airplane cabins—which can be drier than the Sahara. Bring a bottle of water on board. Avoid alcohol, which will dehydrate you.
- If you're flying with kids, don't forget to carry on toys, books, pacifiers, and chewing gum to help them relieve ear pressure buildup during ascent and descent. Let each child pack his or her own backpack with favorite toys.

## Flying with Film & Video

Never pack film—exposed or unexposed—in checked bags, as the new, more powerful scanners in U.S. airports can fog film. The film you carry with you can be damaged by scanners as well. X-ray damage is cumulative; the faster the film, and the more times you put it through a scanner, the more likely the damage. Film under 800 ASA is usually safe for up to five scans. If you're taking your film through additional scans, U.S. regulations permit you to demand hand inspections. In international airports, you're at the mercy of airport officials. On international flights, store your film in transparent baggies, so you can remove it easily before you go through scanners. Keep in mind that airports are not the only places where your camera may be scanned: Highly trafficked attractions are X-raying visitors' bags with increasing frequency.

Most photo supply stores sell protective pouches designed to block damaging X-rays. The pouches fit both film and loaded cameras. They should protect your film in checked baggage, but they also may raise alarms and result in a hand inspection.

You'll have little to worry about if you are traveling with **digital cameras.** Unlike film, which is sensitive to light, the digital camera and storage cards are not affected by airport X-rays, according to Nikon. Still, if you plan to travel extensively, you may want to play it safe and hand-carry your digital equipment or ask that it be inspected by hand. See "Digital Photography on the Road," p. 52.

Carry-on scanners will not damage **videotape** in video cameras, but the magnetic fields emitted by the walk-through security gateways and handheld inspection wands will. Always place your loaded camcorder on the screening conveyor belt or have it hand-inspected. Be sure your batteries are charged, as you may be required to turn the device on to ensure that it's what it appears to be.

## 14 Packages for the Independent Traveler

Before you start searching for the lowest airfare, you may want to consider booking your flight as part of a package. Package tours are not the same thing as escorted tours. Package tours are simply a way to buy the airfare, accommodations, and other elements of your trip (such as car rentals, airport transfers, and sometimes even activities) at the same time and often at discounted prices—kind of like one-stop shopping. Packages are sold in bulk to tour operators—who resell them to the public at a cost that usually undercuts standard rates.

One good source of package deals is the airlines themselves. Most major airlines offer air/land packages, including **American Airlines Vacations** (✆ 800/321-2121; www.aavacations.com), **Delta Vacations** (✆ 800/221-6666; www.deltavacations.com), **Continental Airlines Vacations** (✆ 800/301-3800; www.covacations.com), and **United Vacations** (✆ 888/854-3899; www.unitedvacations.com). Several big **online travel agencies**—Expedia, Travelocity, Orbitz, Site59, and Lastminute.com—also do a brisk business in packages. If you're unsure about the pedigree of a smaller packager, check with the Better Business Bureau in the city where the company is based or go online at www.bbb.org. If a packager won't tell you where they're based, don't fly with them.

**Austravel** (✆ 0870/166-2020 in the U.K.; www.austravel.net) offers independent packages Down Under. The following companies offer both independent and escorted tours: **ATS Tours** (✆ 888/781-5170 in the U.S. and Canada; www.atstours.com); **Collette Vacations** (✆ 401/727 9000 in the U.S., 800/468-5955 in Canada, or 0800/0921-888 in the U.K.; www.collettevacations.com); **Goway** (✆ 800/387-8850 in the U.S. and Canada; www.goway.com); **Maupintour** (✆ 800/255-4266 in the U.S. and Canada; www.maupintour.com); **Qantas Vacations** (✆ 800/348-8145 in the U.S., or 800/348-8137 in Canada; www.qantasvacations.com); **Sunbeam Tours** (✆ 800/955-1818 in the U.S. and Canada); **Swain Australia Tours** (✆ 800/22-SWAIN in the U.S. and Canada; www.swainaustralia.com); Swain Australia's budget-travel division, **Downunder Direct** (✆ 800/642-6224 in the U.S. and Canada; www.downunderdirect.com); and **United Vacations** (✆ 800/377-1816 in the U.S. and Canada; www.unitedvacations.com). Swain Australia is operated and largely staffed by Aussies. Collette Vacations, Sunbeam Tours, Swain Australia, and Goway have offices in Australia.

Travel packages are also listed in the travel section of your local Sunday newspaper. Or check ads in the national travel magazines such as *Arthur Frommer's Budget Travel Magazine, Travel & Leisure, National Geographic Traveler,* and *Condé Nast Traveler.*

Package tours can vary by leaps and bounds. Some offer a better class of hotels than others. Some offer the same hotels for lower prices. Some offer flights on scheduled airlines, while others book charters. Some limit your choice of accommodations and travel days. You are often required to make a large payment upfront. On the plus side, packages can save you money, offering group prices but allowing for independent travel. Some even let you to add on a few guided excursions or escorted day trips (also at prices lower than if you booked them yourself) without booking an entirely escorted tour.

Before you invest in a package tour, get some answers. Ask about the **accommodations choices** and prices for each. Then look up the hotels' reviews in a Frommer's guide and check their rates online for your specific dates of travel.

You'll also want to find out what **type of room** you get. If you need a certain

type of room, ask for it; don't take whatever is thrown your way. Request a nonsmoking room, a quiet room, a room with a view, or whatever you fancy.

Finally, look for **hidden expenses.** Ask whether airport departure fees and taxes, for example, are included in the total cost.

## 15 Escorted General-Interest Tours

Escorted tours are structured group tours, with a group leader. The price usually includes everything from airfare to hotels, meals, tours, admission costs, and local transportation.

**Connections Adventures** (call Australian Pacific Touring ✆ **800/290-8687** in the U.S.; Goway Travel ✆ **800/387 8850** in the U.S. and Canada, or 02/ 9262 4755 in Australia; www.connections 1835.com.au) and **Contiki** (✆ **866/ CONTIKI** in the U.S. and Canada, 09/ 300 1601 in New Zealand, or 02/9511 2200 in Australia; www.contiki.com) specialize in escorted tours for 18- to 35-year-olds. These trips attract a lot of Australians, too, so they are a good way to meet locals. **Premier Vacations** (✆ **800/ 321-6720** in the U.S. and Canada; www. premierdownunder.com) is another reliable escorted tour operator.

Many people derive a certain ease and security from escorted trips. Escorted tours—whether by bus, motor coach, train, or boat—let travelers sit back and enjoy their trip without having to spend lots of time behind the wheel or worrying about details. You know your costs upfront, and there are few surprises. Escorted tours can take you to the maximum number of sights in the minimum amount of time with the least amount of hassle—you don't have to sweat over the plotting and planning of a vacation schedule. Escorted tours are particularly convenient for people with limited mobility. They can also be a great way to make new friends.

On the downside, an escorted tour often requires a big deposit upfront, and lodging and dining choices are predetermined. You'll get little opportunity for serendipitous interactions with locals. The tours can be jam-packed with activities, leaving little room for individual sightseeing, whim, or adventure—plus they also often focus only on the heavily touristed sites, so you miss out on the lesser-known gems.

Before you invest in an escorted tour, ask about the **cancellation policy:** Is a deposit required? Can they cancel the trip if they don't get enough people? Do you get a refund if they cancel? If *you* cancel? How late can you cancel if you are unable to go? When do you pay in full? ***Note:*** If you choose an escorted tour, think strongly about purchasing trip-cancellation insurance, especially if the tour operator asks you to pay upfront. See the section on "Travel Insurance," p. 39.

You'll also want to get a complete **schedule** of the trip to find out how much sightseeing is planned each day and whether enough time has been allotted for relaxing or wandering solo.

The **size** of the group is also important to know upfront. Generally, the smaller the group, the more flexible the itinerary, and the less time you'll spend waiting for people to get on and off the bus. Find out the **demographics** of the group as well. What is the age range? What is the gender breakdown? Is this mostly a trip for couples or singles?

Discuss what is included in the **price.** You may have to pay for transportation to and from the airport. A box lunch may be included in an excursion, but drinks might cost extra. Tips may not be included. Find out if you will be charged if you decide to opt out of certain activities or meals.

Before you invest in a package tour, get some answers. Ask about the **accommodations choices** and prices for each. Then look up the hotels' reviews in a Frommer's guide and check their rates online for your specific dates of travel. You'll also want to find out what **type of room** you get. If you need a certain type of room, ask for it; don't take whatever is thrown your way. Request a nonsmoking room, a quiet room, a room with a view, or whatever you fancy.

Finally, if you plan to travel alone, you'll need to know if a **single supplement** will be charged and if the company can match you up with a roommate.

## 16 The Active Traveler

Australia's wide-open spaces and great weather cry out to even the most dedicated lazybones. Most operators and outfitters listed below specialize in adventure vacations for small groups. Meals, accommodations, equipment rental, and guides are usually included in their packages, though international airfares are not. Where you end up spending the night varies depending on the package you select—on a sea-kayaking trip, you almost always camp on the beach; on a hiking expedition you may stay at a wilderness lodge; and on a biking trip you often stop over at B&B-style lodgings. More information on the outdoor activities discussed below appears in the relevant regional chapters. ***Tip:*** Before you hit the outdoors, review the safety tips in the "Health & Safety" section, p. 40.

### SCUBA DIVING

Diving Down Under is one of the best travel experiences in the world. There are good dive sites all around the coastline, not just on the Great Barrier Reef. A second barrier reef in Ningaloo Reef Marine Park stretches 260km (161 miles) off the coast of Western Australia. (See chapter 10 or Exmouth Diving Centre's website at www.exmouthdiving.com.au for a good description of dive sites there.) Not all the good sites are on coral. In Tasmania, for instance, you can dive kelp beds popular with seals, and in South Australia you can cage-dive with great white sharks. For a rundown on the country's outstanding dive areas, see "The Best Affordable Diving & Snorkeling Sites" in chapter 1.

Wherever you find coral in Australia, you'll find dive companies offering learn-to-dive courses, day trips, and, in some cases, extended journeys on live-aboard vessels. Most international dive certificates, including PADI, NAUI, SSI, and BSAC, are recognized. It's easy to rent gear and wet suits wherever you go, or you can bring your own.

Beginners' courses are known as "open-water certification" and usually require 2 days of theory in a pool at the dive company's premises, followed by 2 or 3 days on a live-aboard boat where you make between four and nine dives, including a night dive if you opt for the 5-day course. Open-water certification courses range from an intensive 3 to 5 days, for which you can expect to pay about A$350 to A$600 (US$280–US$480). A 5-day course is seen as the best. When comparing the value offered by dive schools, keep in mind that if the practical section of your course does not take place on a live-aboard boat, you will have to budget for accommodations and meals. Most operators offer courses right up to instructor level. If you're pressed for time, a PADI Referral course might suit you. It allows you to do your theory work at home, do a few hours of pool work at a PADI dive center in your home country, and then spend 2 or 3 days in the Australian ocean doing your qualifying dives.

Remember to allow time in your itinerary for a medical exam in Australia (see

**Tips Peak Time on the Reef**

August through January is peak visibility time on the Great Barrier Reef, but the marine life will amaze you any time of year.

the next paragraph), and expect the dive instructor to grill you on your theory again before you hit the water.

If you're already a certified diver, remember to bring your "C" card and log book. If you're going to do a dive course, you'll need a medical certificate from an Australian doctor that meets Australian standard AS4005.1, stating that you are fit for scuba diving. (An all-purpose physical is not enough.) Virtually all dive schools will arrange the medical exam for you; expect to pay around A$50 (US$40) for it. Remember, you must complete your last dive 24 hours before you fly in an aircraft. This catches a lot of people off guard when they are preparing to fly to their next destination the day after a visit to the Reef. You won't be able to helicopter off the Reef back to the mainland, either. Check to see if your travel insurance covers diving. **The Divers Alert Network** (✆ **800/446-2671;** www.diversalertnetwork.org) sells diving insurance and has diving and nondiving medical emergency hot lines, and an information line for dive-related medical questions.

If you've never been diving and don't plan to become qualified, you can see what all the fuss is about on an "introductory" dive that lets you dive in the company of an instructor on a one-time basis, with a briefing beforehand. Most dive operators on the Great Barrier Reef and other dive locations offer introductory dives.

See "Exploring the Great Barrier Reef" in chapter 7 for more information.

For information on dive regions and operators, try the state tourism marketing boards' websites (see "Visitor Information," earlier in this chapter). Tourism Queensland's website www.queenslandholidays.com.au has information on most dive operators working the Great Barrier Reef. If you know where you want to dive, you may obtain an even more detailed list of operators by bypassing the big tourism boards and contacting the local tourist office for a list of local dive operators. **Dive Queensland** (the Queensland Dive Tourism Association; ✆ **07/4051 1510;** fax 07/4051 1519; www.dive-queensland.com.au) requires its member operators to abide by a code of ethics. Its website has a list of members and the services they offer. It includes a few in other states, too. Another good source is **Diversion Dive Travel & Training** (✆ **07/4039 0200;** www.diversionoz.com), a Cairns-based travel agent that specializes in dive holidays on the Great Barrier Reef, as well as in other good dive spots in Australia. It books day trips and extended diving excursions on a choice of live-aboard vessels, as well as dive courses, island resorts with diving, accommodations, and non-diving tours. It also sells diving insurance. Its proprietors are both dive instructors, and one of them is trained as a Handicapped Diving Instructor for divers with disabilities.

Peter Stone's *Dive Australia* is a 608-page guidebook to more than 2,000 dive sites all over Australia. It by no means lists every site, but it does contain many sites off the dive-tourist trail (many not on the Great Barrier Reef), so divers in search of new territory may find it handy. It also contains a lot of background such as dive operators and associations, a chapter on Australian diving law, the nearest hyperbaric chambers, and travel tips. Order from the publisher, Oceans Enterprises

(✆ **03/5182 5108;** www.oceans.com.au). The book costs A$42 (US$34) plus postage.

## BUSHWALKING (HIKING)

With so much unique scenery and many rare animals and plants, it's not surprising that Australia is full of national parks crisscrossed with hiking trails. You're never far from a park with a bushwalk, whether it's an easy stroll or a 6-day odyssey on the Cape-to-Cape trail in Western Australia.

A good Australian bushwalking website is **www.bushwalking.org.au**. The best place to get information about bushwalking is the National Parks & Wildlife Service or its equivalent in each state; sources include:

- **Environmental Protection Agency** (QLD Parks & Wildlife Service; ✆ **07/3227 7111;** www.epa.qld.gov.au).
- **NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service** (www.npws.nsw.gov.au). It has a visitor information center at 102 George St., The Rocks, Sydney (✆ **1300/361 967** in Australia, or 02/9253 4600).
- **Parks & Wildlife Commission of the Northern Territory** (✆ **08/8999 5511;** www.nt.gov.au/ipe/pwcnt). The Northern Territory Tourist Commission (see "Exploring the Red Centre" in chapter 8) is the official source of information on parks and wildlife matters.
- **Parks Victoria** (✆ **13 19 63;** www.parkweb.vic.gov.au).
- **South Australian Department for Environment and Heritage** (✆ **08/8204 9010;** www.denr.sa.gov.au).
- **Tasmania Parks and Wildlife Service** (✆ **1300/368 550;** www.dpiwe.tas.gov.au).
- **Western Australian Department of Conservation and Land Management** (CALM; ✆ **08/9334 0333;** www.calm.wa.gov.au).

Some parks charge an entry fee, often ranging from A$6 to A$18 (US$4.80–US$14).

## MORE ACTIVE VACATIONS FROM A TO Z

**ABSEILING** Rappelling is another name for this sport that involves backing down vertical cliff faces on a rope and harness. The rugged, beautiful Blue Mountains near Sydney are Australia's abseiling capital. In the Margaret River region in Western Australia, you can do it as mighty breakers crash on the cliffs below. You can even do it in the heart of Brisbane on riverside cliffs.

**BIKING** Much of Australia's countryside is flat and ideal for cycling, as Aussies call biking, but consider the heat and vast distances before setting out. There are plenty of biking trails. The rainforest hills behind Cairns hosted the world mountain-biking championships in 1996, and Sydney's Blue Mountains have good mountain-biking trails. On Rottnest Island off Perth, it's the only mode of transport from one coral-filled bay to the next. All major towns and most resort centers rent regular bikes and mountain bikes.

If you're interested in taking an extended trip, you may find a copy of *Cycling Australia: Bicycle Touring Throughout the Sunny Continent,* by Australian Ian Duckworth (Motorbooks, 1996) useful. This 224-page guide outlines short trips and eight long trips with maps and route descriptions. Any bookstore can order it, or it is often available used for under US$5 from www.amazon.com or for £9.95 from the Quayside Bookshop in the United Kingdom (✆ **01626/77 5436;** quaybook@aol.com).

**Remote Outback Cycle Tours** (✆ **08/9279 6969;** www.cycletours.com.au) takes novice and expert riders, young and old, on extended tours across the country. The distances are vast, but the trip combines cycling with four-wheel-drive

travel. Itineraries include the Red Centre, the historic Oodnadatta Track cattle-driving route from Alice Springs to Adelaide via the underground opal-mining town of Coober Pedy in South Australia, and from Adelaide to Perth across the Nullarbor Plain desert and through the pretty Margaret River wine region in southern Western Australia.

**BIRDING** Australia's unique geography as an island continent means it has species you won't see anywhere else. It is probably best known for its brilliant parrots, but you will see species from the wetlands, savanna, *mulga* scrub, desert, oceans, dense bushland, rainforest, mangroves, rivers, and other habitats. More than half of the country's species have been spotted in the Daintree Rain Forest area in north Queensland, and one-third live in wetlands-rich Kakadu National Park in the Top End. The Coorong in South Australia and Broome in the Top End are home to marvelous waterfowl populations.

To get in touch with birding clubs all over Australia, contact **Birds Australia** (✆ **03/9882 2622;** www.birdsaustralia.com.au).

**Kirrama Wildlife Tours** (✆ **07/4065 5181;** www.kirrama.com.au) operates birding expeditions to remote regions in northern Australia from a base in north Queensland. Broome-based ornithologist George Swann of **Kimberley Birdwatching, Wildlife & Natural History Tours** (✆ **08/9192 1246;** www.kimberleybirdwatching.com.au) leads extended birding trips throughout the Kimberley and the Northern Territory. Fine Feather Tours (✆ **07/4094 1199;** www.finefeathertours.com.au), based near Port Douglas near the Daintree Rain Forest, operates bird-watching day trips and afternoon river cruises.

**CANOEING & SEA KAYAKING** Katherine Gorge in the Northern Territory offers some spectacular flat canoeing. You'll find delightful canoeing on the bird-rich Ord River in the Top End. Katherine Gorge and the Ord are full of generally harmless freshwater crocodiles, but *never* canoe in saltwater-crocodile territory. White-water canoeing can be found in Barrington Tops National Park north of Sydney.

A growing number of operators all around the coastline rent kayaks and lead guided expeditions. Popular spots are the Whitsunday Islands in north Queensland, the cold southern seas around Tasmania, and Byron Bay, where you can take a 3-hour "dolphin kayaking" trip to see wild dolphins (and whales June–Oct) and "kayak-surf" the waves.

**Rivergods** (✆ **08/9259 0749;** www.rivergods.com.au) conducts multiday sea-kayaking, canoeing, and white-water-rafting adventures throughout Western Australia's pristine ocean and rivers, in which whales, sharks, dugongs (manatees), sea snakes, turtles, and dolphins abound. The company also runs a "sea kayak with wild seals" day outing from Perth. **Gecko Canoeing** (✆ **08/8972 2224;** www.geckocanoeing.com.au) leads canoeing trips of 1 to 18 days from Katherine along remote Top End rivers between April and September.

**CAVING** Australia doesn't have a lot of caves, but the ones it has are spectacular. The best spots are in the Blue Mountains west of Sydney and the Margaret River region in southwest Western Australia. For tourists who want to see caves and stay clean and safe (as opposed to spelunkers), the best caves are the spectacular Jenolan Caves in the Blue Mountains, a honeycomb of caverns bursting with intricate stalactites and stalagmites, and the 350 limestone caves in Margaret River, of which five are open to the public. Two are "adventure caves," which any novice caver (as opposed to an experienced spelunker) can explore on a 2- or 3-hour tour. You can also go caving at

Olssen's Capricorn Caverns, near Rockhampton, in Central Queensland.

**FISHING** Reef, game, deep sea, beach, estuary, and river fishing—Australia's massive coastline lets you do it all. Drop a line for coral trout on the Great Barrier Reef, go for the world-record black marlin off Cairns, hook a fighting "barra" (barramundi) in the Northern Territory or the Kimberley, or cast for trout in Tasmania's highland lakes. Charter boats will take you out for the day from most towns all around the coast.

**GOLF** Australians are almost as passionate about golf as they are about football and cricket—after all, Greg Norman started life as an Aussie! Queensland has the lion's share of the stunning resort courses, such as the Sheraton Mirage in Port Douglas, the Laguna Quays Resort near the Whitsundays, and the Hyatt Regency Sanctuary Cove Resort on the Gold Coast. The Gold Coast has more than 40 courses. Joondaloop Country Club in Western Australia was voted Number One Resort Course in Australia by *Golf Australia* magazine for 2003. One of the world's best desert courses is at Alice Springs.

Most courses rent clubs for around A$30 (US$24). Greens fees start at around A$20 (US$16) for 18 holes but average A$65 (US$52) or more on a championship course. **Koala Golf** (✆ **1300/301 686;** www.koalagolf.com) offers escorted day trips and package tours to excellent golf courses in major cities and holiday areas around Australia. It has offices in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Perth, Cairns, and Queensland's Gold and Sunshine coasts.

**HORSEBACK RIDING** Horseback-riding operators are everywhere in Australia. A particularly pleasant vacation is a multiday riding and camping trek in "The Man from Snowy River" country, the Snowy Mountains in New South Wales.

**SAILING** The 74 islands of the Whitsundays in Queensland are an out-of-this-world backdrop for sailing. And you don't have to be an expert—the Whitsunday region is Australia's "bareboating" capital. Bareboating means you can charter an unskippered yacht and sail yourself. Even those without a scrap of experience can do it, although it's best to have someone on board who knows aft from fore. Perth and Sydney are mad about sailing; experienced sailors can head to the nearest yacht club to offer themselves as crew, especially during summer twilight races. The clubs are often short of sailors, and most will welcome out-of-towners.

**SURFING** You'll have no trouble finding a good surf beach along the Australian coast. Perth and Sydney are blessed with loads right in the city. Other popular spots include the Gold and Sunshine Coasts in Queensland, the legendary Southern Ocean swells along Victoria's southern coast, and magnificent sets off Margaret River in Western Australia. Don't take your board much north of the Sunshine Coast—the Great Barrier Reef puts a stop to the swell from there all the way to the northern tip of Queensland. Loads of companies rent surf gear. Beginner lessons are offered at many surf beaches. Remember, surf only at patrolled beaches, and never surf alone.

**WHITE-WATER RAFTING** The best rapids are the Class V torrents on the Nymboida and Gwydir rivers behind Coffs Harbour in New South Wales. More Class V rapids await you on the Johnstone River in north Queensland, where access is by helicopter. Loads of tourists who have never held a paddle hurtle down the Class III to IV Tully River or the gentler Class II to III Barron River on a day trip from Cairns. The Snowy River National Park in Victoria and the Franklin River in the wilds of

Tasmania are other popular spots. See also "Canoeing & Sea Kayaking," above.

### AUSTRALIA-BASED OUTFITTERS & OPERATORS

**Auswalk** (✆ **02/6457 2220;** www.auswalk.com.au) offers self-drive or escorted accommodated walking tours through picturesque parts of Australia such as the Great Ocean Road in Victoria, tropical Magnetic Island in Queensland, and the Fraser Island wilderness.

**Tasmanian Expeditions** (✆ **03/6339 3999;** www.tas-ex.com) conducts day trips and extended expeditions featuring hiking, cycling, rafting, abseiling, canoeing, sea kayaking, and rock-climbing throughout Tasmania's national parks and unspoiled rural areas.

**World Expeditions** (✆ **888/464-TREK** or 415/989-2212 in the U.S., 020/8870-2600 in the U.K., 09/368 4161 in New Zealand, or 02/8270 8400 or 1300/720 000 in Australia; www.worldexpeditions.com.au) runs expeditions in many parts of Australia. Destinations include places less traveled, such as Hinchinbrook Island in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park and the long-distance Bibbulmun Track in Western Australia's southwest. Some trips incorporate other pursuits, like rafting, sailing, or biking.

### U.S.-BASED OUTFITTERS & OPERATORS

The **Great Outdoor Recreation Pages (GORP)** site (**http://gorp.away.com**) not only has links to adventure-tour operators to Australia, but also contains articles, sells books and maps, and has links to heaps of sites on Australia with an action slant.

**Outer Edge Expeditions** (✆ **800/322-5235** or 517/552-5300; www.outeredge.com) and **The World Outdoors** (✆ **800/488-8483** or 303/413-0938; www.theworldoutdoors.com) both offer ecologically minded multisport diving, hiking, mountain-biking, canoeing, and kayaking packages to the Great Barrier Reef and North Queensland rainforest.

## 17 Getting Around Australia

Lesson number one: You won't be able to see Uluru (Ayers Rock) from your Sydney hotel room window. It's 2,841km (1,761 miles) away. Possibly the biggest mistake tourists make Down Under (apart from getting horribly sunburned) is failing to comprehend the distances between popular locations. One of the urban legends that grew up around the 2000 Olympics was the tale of the tourist who asked where in Sydney Harbour he could catch the boat to the Great Barrier Reef. That's a mere 2,800km (1,736 miles) north. Don't try to cram too much into your trip.

Traveling overland may make sense in Europe or North America, but in Australia flying is the best way between most points. People who go by train, bus, or car are often disappointed at Australia's flat vistas of desert, wheat fields, and gum trees—the same landscape can go on for days. A good compromise is to take to the air for long trips and save the land travel for short hops of a few hours. Try not to backtrack, which eats up valuable time and money.

### BY PLANE

Australia is a big country with a small population to support its air routes. Airfares are high. This section contains some tips to help you save.

Most domestic air travel is operated by **Qantas** (✆ 800/227-4500 in the U.S. and Canada, 020/8600 4307 in the U.K., 09/357 8900 in Auckland, 0800/808 767 in New Zealand, or 13 13 13 in Australia; www.qantas.com.au). You may get a cheaper fare with the no-frills airlines **Virgin Blue** (✆ 13 67 89 in Australia, or

07/3295 2296; www.virginblue.com.au), its sibling company **Pacific Blue** (✆ 13 16 45 in Australia, or 07/3295 2284; www.virginblue.com.au), or Qantas-owned newcomer **Jetstar** (✆ 13 15 38 in Australia, or 03/8341 4901; www.jetstar.com.au). Another Qantas subsidiary, **Australian Airlines** (book through Qantas or call ✆ 1300/799 798 in Australia for general inquiries; www.australianairlines.com.au), flies from Cairns to Sydney and the Gold Coast, as well as to ports in Asia. Newcomer **Regional Express** (✆ 13 17 13 in Australia, or 03/8341 4901; www.regionalexpress.com.au) serves regional New South Wales, South Australia, Victoria, and northern Tasmania.

Virgin flies to every capital, as well as Cairns, Townsville, Mackay, Proserpine, Rockhampton, Hervey Bay, the Gold Coast, and the Sunshine Coast, all in Queensland; Broome and Kalgoorlie in Western Australia; Alice Springs in the Red Centre; several coastal towns in New South Wales; and Launceston in Tasmania. Jetstar serves only the eastern states, South Australia and Tasmania, flying to Cairns, the Whitsundays, Mackay, Rockhampton, the Sunshine Coast, the Gold Coast, Brisbane, Sydney, Newcastle, Adelaide, Hobart, Launceston, and Melbourne. (Melbourne has two airports, the main international terminal at Tullamarine and Avalon Airport, about 50km/31 miles from the city. Make sure you check which one your flight leaves from before you book.) Competition is hot, so it's likely that both Virgin Blue and Jetstar will have added to their route networks before you get to Australia.

Australia's air network is not as well developed as that of North America or Europe, so don't assume there is a direct flight to your chosen destination or that there is a flight every hour or even every day. ***Note:*** All flights in Australia are nonsmoking.

**FARES FOR INTERNATIONAL TRAVELERS** Qantas typically offers international travelers a discount of around 30% off the full fares that Australians pay for domestic flights bought within Australia. To qualify, quote your passport number and international ticket number when reserving. Don't assume the fare for international travelers is the best deal, though—the latest deal in the market that day (or even better, perhaps, a package deal with accommodations thrown in) may be cheaper still.

**AIR PASSES** If you plan on whipping around to more than one city, purchasing a Qantas **Boomerang Pass** is much cheaper than buying regular fares. You must buy the minimum-size pass before you arrive in Australia, and you can extend it to other cities once you get there. Residents of Australia and New Zealand cannot purchase this pass.

With Qantas's Boomerang Pass, for example, you must purchase a minimum of two coupons (with a maximum of 10), priced differently depending on where you travel and whether the flights are in high demand. Fares are sold in zones; Zone A prices start at A$160 (US$128) for flights of up to 1,200km (750 miles); Zone B at A$295 (US$236) for those between 1,201 and 1,840km (751–1,150 miles); Zone C at A$360 (US$288) for travel more than 1,840km (1,150 miles). Travel to Cairns from Melbourne and Sydney is at Zone B rates, as is travel to Alice Springs and Uluru (Ayers Rock) from anywhere in Australia. There is an A$175 (US$140) surcharge each way on flights to luxury Hayman Island in the Whitsundays. Fares may be higher depending on the availability of seats, so your coupons may cost more depending on the day you buy them and how many seats are available on the flight you book.

Passes are a great value when you consider that a fully flexible one-way fare from Melbourne to Cairns—a 2,254km

(1,400-mile), 2-hour journey—is slightly more than A$800 (US$640), compared with the Boomerang pass fare of A$295 (US$236).

Coupons are also good for travel to and from New Zealand and to the most popular South Pacific nations, and can also be used with Air Pacific and Air Vanuatu. You must book your first two coupon destinations before you arrive; you can book the rest as you go, by phoning or visiting any Qantas office. Another great thing about these fares is that they are changeable and the unused portion is refundable; you will incur an A$50 (US$40) fee to change destinations after the coupons have been issued. Many small towns and short flight sectors, some island resorts, and some airports served by subsidiaries of Qantas are not covered by the passes, but most times you can find local fares to these places that are just as good a value as the Boomerang pass.

## BY TRAIN

Australia's trains are clean, comfortable, and safe, and for the most part service standards and facilities are perfectly adequate. The rail network in Australia links Perth to Adelaide and continues on to Melbourne and north to Canberra, Sydney, Brisbane, and right up the coast to Cairns. There's also a line from Adelaide to Alice Springs and Darwin. Some rural towns, such as Broken Hill, also have rail service. Trains generally cost more than buses but are still reasonably priced. Most long-distance trains have sleepers with big windows, air-conditioning, electric outlets, wardrobes, hand basins, and fresh sheets and blankets. First-class sleepers have en-suite (attached private) bathrooms, and fares often include meals. Second-class sleepers use shared shower facilities, and meals are not included. Some second-class sleepers are private cabins; on other trains you share with strangers. Single cabins are usually of broom-closet dimensions but surprisingly comfy, with their own toilet and basin. The food ranges from mediocre to pretty good. Smoking is usually banned, or allowed only in the club cars or special "smoking rooms."

Different entities manage Australia's rail routes. They are the private enterprise **Great Southern Railway** (✆ **13 21 47** in Australia, or 08/8213 4592; www.gsr.com.au), which runs the *Indian Pacific,* the *Overland,* and the *Ghan,* and these government bodies: **Traveltrain,** the long-distance train division of Queensland Rail (✆ **13 22 32** in Australia, or 07/3235 1122; www.traveltrain.com.au), which handles rail within that state; **Countrylink** (✆ **13 22 32** in Australia, or 02/8202 2000; www.countrylink.info), which manages travel within New South Wales and from Sydney to Canberra, Melbourne, and Brisbane; and the **Public Transport Authority,** or PTA (✆ **1300/662 205** in Western Australia, or 08/9326 2600; www.transwa.wa.gov.au), which operates trains in Western Australia.

Outside Australia, the umbrella organization **Rail Australia** (www.railaustralia.com.au) handles inquiries and makes reservations for all long-distance trains, with the exception of PTA routes, through its overseas agents: **ATS Tours** (✆ **310/643-0044**) in the U.S.; **Goway** (✆ **416/322-1034**) in Canada; **International Rail** (✆ **0870/751-5000**) in the U.K.; and **Tranz Scenic** (✆ **03/339 3809**) in New Zealand.

Great Southern Railway's ***Indian Pacific*** ★ is a glamorous train linking Sydney, Broken Hill, Adelaide, and Perth in a 3-day Outback run twice a week. Slightly less posh but still comfortable, the ***Ghan*** (named after Afghani camel trainers who traveled the Outback in the 19th century) travels between Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, and Alice Springs twice a week, with connections from Sydney and Perth on the *Indian Pacific* and

from Melbourne on the *Overland* (see below). In early 2004, a new rail line opened linking Alice Springs and Darwin, with twice weekly round-trips between Adelaide and Darwin and between Adelaide and Alice Springs. Both the *Ghan* and the *Indian Pacific* offer a choice of economy seats and second- or first-class sleepers.

Great Southern Railway's third train, the ***Overland,*** links Adelaide and Melbourne twice a week. Countrylink runs daily trains from Sydney to Melbourne, Canberra, and Brisbane, and to a number of New South Wales country towns.

Queensland Rail's Traveltrain operates two trains on the Brisbane-Cairns route: The ***Sunlander*** runs twice a week from Brisbane to Cairns, offering a choice of the premium, all-inclusive Queenslander Class; single-, double-, or triple-berth sleepers; or economy seats. Two services also run as far as Townsville on this route without Queenslander Class. The high-speed **Tilt Train** operates three weekly trips on the same route in less time—by about 8 hours—with business-class-style seating. Tilt Trains also serve Rockhampton daily from Brisbane. Traveltrain also operates trains to Outback towns. All Traveltrain and most Countrylink long-distance trains stop at most towns en route, so they're useful for exploring the eastern states.

**PACKAGES** Great Southern Railway, Countrylink, and Queensland Rail Traveltrain (see above) offer rail packages that include accommodations and sightseeing.

**RAIL PASSES** National, East Coast, New South Wales, Queensland, and Great Southern Railway rail passes are available from Rail Australia (see above) at its overseas agents. National passes must be bought before you arrive and are available only to holders of non-Australian passports. East Coast (Melbourne-Sydney-Brisbane-Cairns) and Queensland passes can be purchased before or after you arrive in Australia. Passes are not valid for first-class travel, but upgrades are available.

The national **Austrail Flexipass** is good for economy seats and second-class sleepers on all long-distance trains (except PTA service in Western Australia) and is even good for suburban city train networks. It allows you to travel for 15 or 22 days, consecutive or not, within a 6-month period. Prices are A$862 (US$690) for a 15-day Flexipass to A$1,210 (US$968) for a 22-day Flexipass.

## BY BUS

Bus travel in Australia is a big step up from the low-rent affair it can be in the United States. Terminals are centrally located and well lit, the buses—called "coaches" Down Under—are clean and air-conditioned, you sit in adjustable seats, videos play on board, and the drivers are polite and sometimes even point out places of interest along the way. Some buses have restrooms. Unlike Australia's train service, the extensive bus network will take you almost everywhere. Buses are all nonsmoking.

Australia has one national coach operator: **Greyhound Australia** (✆ **13 14 99** in Australia, or 07/4690 9950; www.greyhound.com.au; no relation to Greyhound in the U.S.). The company does not operate within Tasmania, which is serviced by **Redline Coaches** (✆ **1300/360 0000** in Australia, or 03/6336 1446; www.redlinecoaches.com.au). In addition to point-to-point services, Greyhound Australia also offers a limited range of tours at popular locations on its networks, including Uluru, Kakadu, Monkey Mia in Western Australia, and the Great Ocean Road in Victoria.

***Note:*** Fares and some passes are considerably cheaper for seniors, students, backpacker cardholders, and Hostelling International/YHA members.

**BUS PASSES** Bus passes are a great value. There are several kinds—Day

passes, Preset Itinerary passes, and Kilometre passes. Look into the one that suits you best. Note that even with a pass, you may still need to book the next leg of your trip 12 or 24 hours ahead as a condition of the pass; during school vacation periods, which are always busy, booking as much as 7 days ahead may be smart.

If you know where you are going and are willing to obey a "no backtracking" rule, consider Greyhound Australia's **Aussie Explorer** predetermined itinerary pass. These passes allow unlimited stops in a generous time frame on a preset one-way route (you are permitted to travel the route in either direction). There is a huge range of itineraries to choose from. As an example, the **Aussie Reef and Rock** pass takes in Alice Springs, Katherine, Darwin, Mount Isa, Cairns, and the whole east coast down to Sydney. The pass is valid for 6 months and costs A$1,131 (US$905) from Sydney, including tours to Uluru (Ayers Rock), Kakadu National Park, and Kings Canyon. You don't have to start in Sydney; you can start at any point along any of the pass routes, in which case the pass may be cheaper. In the case of the Reef and Rock pass, that means you could start farther up the track, at Brisbane (in which case the pass costs A$1,046/US$837) or Cairns (from where the pass costs A$698/US$558). The **All Australian Pass** costs A$2,458 (US$1,966) and is valid for a year.

The **Aussie Kilometre Pass** allows unlimited stops in any direction within the mileage you buy. Passes are available in increments of 1,000km (620 miles). Prices range from A$328 (US$262) for 2,000km (1,240 miles)—enough to get you from Cairns to Brisbane—to A$2,310 (US$1,848) for a whopping 20,000km (6,200 miles).

## SAMPLE TRAVEL TIMES & BUS FARES

Here are some sample bus fares and travel times, to give you an idea of what you're getting yourself into as you step aboard. All fares and times are one-way.

| Route | Travel Time (Approx.) | Fare |
|---|---|---|
| Broome–Darwin | 27 hr. | A$302 (US$242) |
| Sydney–Brisbane | 17 hr. | A$100 (US$80) |
| Cairns–Brisbane | 29 hr. | A$201 (US$161) |

## BY CAR

Australia's roads sometimes leave a bit to be desired. The taxes of 19 million people get spread pretty thin when it comes to maintaining roads across a continent. Most highways are two-lane affairs with the occasional rut and pothole, often no outside line markings, and sometimes no shoulders to speak of.

When you are poring over the map of Australia, remember that what looks like a road may be an unsealed (unpaved) track suitable for four-wheel-drive vehicles only. Many roads in the Top End are passable only in the Dry season (about Apr–Nov). If you plan long-distance driving, get a road map (see below for sources) that marks paved and unpaved roads.

You cannot drive across the middle of the country (except along the north-south Stuart Highway linking Adelaide and Darwin) because most of it is desert. In most places you must travel around the edge on Highway 1. The map inside the back cover of this book marks the major highways.

You can use your current driver's license or an international driver's permit in every state of Australia. By law, you must carry your license with you when

driving. The minimum driving age is 16 or 17, depending on which state you visit, but some car-rental companies require you to be 21, or sometimes 26, if you want to rent a four-wheel-drive vehicle.

## CAR RENTALS

Think twice about renting a car in tourist hot spots such as Cairns. In these areas most tour operators pick you up and drop you back at your hotel door, so having a car may not be worth the expense.

The "big four" car-rental companies all have networks across Australia:

- **Avis** (✆ **13 63 33** in Australia, www.avis.com.au; 800/230-4898 in the U.S., www.avis.com; 800/272-5871 in Canada, www.avis.ca; 0870/6060-100 in the U.K., www.avis.co.uk, and Ireland, www.avis.ie; 0800/655 111 in New Zealand, www.avis.co.nz)
- **Budget** (✆ **1300/794 344** in Australia, www.budget.com.au; 800/527-0700 in the U.S., www.budget.com; 800/268-8900 in Canada, www.budget.ca; 0134/4484-100 in the U.K., www.budget.co.uk; 906/627-711 in Ireland, www.budget.ie; 0800/283 438 in New Zealand, www.budget.co.nz)
- **Hertz** (✆ **13 30 39** in Australia, www.hertz.com.au; 800/654-3131 in the U.S., www.hertz.com; 800/263-0600 in English or 800/263-0678 in French in Canada, or 416/620-9620 in Toronto, www.hertz.ca; 020/7026-0077 in the U.K., www.hertz.co.uk; 1/676-7476 in Ireland; 0800/654 321 in New Zealand)
- **Thrifty** (✆ **1300/367 227** in Australia, www.thrifty.com.au; 800/229-0984 in the U.S. and Canada, www.thrifty.com; 0800/783-0405 in the U.K., www.thrifty.co.uk; 1800/51-5800 in Ireland, www.thrifty.ie; 0800/73 7070 in New Zealand, www.thrifty.co.nz)

Two other large companies with offices around Australia are:

- **Europcar** (✆ **1300/13 13 90** or 03/9330 6160 in Australia, www.deltaeuropcar.com.au; 877/940-6900 in the U.S. and Canada, www.europcaramericas.com; 0870/607-5000 in the U.K., www.europcar.co.uk; 1/614-2800 in Ireland, www.europcar.ie; 0800/628 227 in New Zealand). Europcar has the third-largest fleet in Australia.
- **Red Spot Car Rentals** (✆ **1300/668 810** in Australia, or 02/9211 1144; www.redspotrentals.com.au). It has depots in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Perth, Cairns, and the Gold Coast.

## SAMPLE DRIVING DISTANCES & TIMES

Here are a few sample road distances between popular points and the minimum time it takes to drive between them.

| Route | Distance | Approx. Driving Time |
|---|---|---|
| Cairns–Sydney | 2,495km (1,547 miles) | 29 hr. (allow 4–5 days) |
| Sydney–Melbourne | 873km (541 miles) | 15 hr. (allow 1–2 days) |
| Sydney–Perth | 4,131km (2,561 miles) | 51 hr. (allow 6–7 days) |
| Adelaide–Darwin | 3,024km (1,875 miles) | 31 hr. (allow 4–6 days) |
| Perth–Darwin | 4,163km (2,581 miles) | 49 hr. (allow 6–8 days) |

A small sedan for zipping around a city or touring a wine region will run about A$45 to A$80 (US$36–US$64) a day. A bigger vehicle with enough grunt to get you from state to state will be around A$70 to A$100 (US$56–US$80) a day.

Rentals of a week or more usually reduce the price by about A$5 (US$4) a day.

A regular car will get you to most places in this book, but because the country has many unpaved roads, it can make sense to rent a four-wheel-drive vehicle. All of the major car-rental companies rent them. They are more expensive than a regular car, but you can get them for as little as A$75 (US$60) per day if you shop around, cheaper for rentals of a week or longer.

The rates quoted here are only a guide. Many smaller local companies—and the big guys, too—offer competitive specials, especially in tourist areas with distinct off seasons. Advance purchase rates, usually 7 to 21 days, can offer significant savings.

**INSURANCE** Insurance for loss of, or damage to, the car, and third-party property insurance are usually included, but read the agreement carefully because the fine print contains information the front-desk staff may not tell you. For example, damage to the car body may be covered, but not damage to the windshield or tires, or damage caused by water or driving too close to a bushfire.

The deductible, known as "excess" in Australia, on insurance may be as high as A$2,000 (US$1,600) for regular cars and up to A$5,500 (US$4,400) on four-wheel-drives and motor homes. You can reduce it, or avoid it altogether, by paying a premium of between about A$20 to A$50 (US$16–US$40) per day on a car or four-wheel-drive, and around A$25 to A$50 (US$20–US$40) per day on a motor home. The amount of the excess reduction premium depends on the vehicle type and the extent of reduction you choose. Your rental company may bundle personal accident insurance and baggage insurance into this premium. And again, check the conditions; some excess reduction payments do not reduce excesses on single-vehicle accidents, for example.

**ONE-WAY RENTALS** Australia's distances often make one-way rentals a necessity, for which car-rental companies can charge a hefty penalty amounting to hundreds of dollars. A one-way fee usually applies to motor-home renters, too—usually around A$200 to A$220 (US$160–US$176), more for remote outback areas such as Broome and Alice Springs. And there's a 7-day rental minimum.

**MOTOR HOMES** Motor homes (Aussies call them camper vans) are popular in Australia. Generally smaller than the RVs in the United States, they come in two-, three-, four-, or six-berth versions, and usually have everything you need, such as a minifridge/freezer (icebox in the smaller versions), microwave, gas stove, cooking and cleaning utensils, linens, and touring information including maps and campground guides. All have showers and toilets, except some two-berthers. Most have air-conditioned driver's cabins, but not all have air-conditioned living quarters, a necessity in most parts of the country from November through March. Four-wheel-drive campers are available, but they tend to be small, and some lack hot water, toilet, shower, and air-conditioning. Minimum driver age for motor homes is usually 21.

**Tips Insurance Alert**

Damage to a rental car caused by an animal (hitting a kangaroo, for instance) is not covered by car-rental companies' insurance policies. Nor is driving on an unpaved road—and Australia has a lot of those.

Australia's biggest national motorhome-rental companies are **Apollo Motorhome Holidays** (✆ **1800/777 779** in Australia, or 07/3260 5466; www.apollocamper.com.au), **Britz Campervan Rentals** (✆ **1800/331 454** in Australia, or 03/8379 8890; www.britz.com), **Hertz Campervans** (✆ **1800/335 888** in Australia, or 08/8261 8833), and **Maui** (✆ **1300/363 800** in Australia, or 03/8379 8891; www.maui-rentals.com).

For a two-berth motor home with shower and toilet, Britz's 2005 to 2006 rates range from A$50 to A$190 (US$40–US$152) per day, over a 5- to 20-day rental period. For a four-berth with shower and toilet over the same period, you are looking at A$120 to A$270 (US$96–US$216) per day. Rates vary with the seasons. May and June are the slowest months; December and January are the busiest. It's sometimes possible to get better rates by booking in your home country before departure. Renting for longer than 3 weeks knocks a few dollars off the daily rate. Most companies will demand a minimum 4- or 5-day rental. Give the company your itinerary before booking because some routes, such as the ferry across to Tasmania—or, in the case of a four-wheel-drive motor home, the Gibb River Road in the Kimberley—may need the company's permission. Companies may not permit you to drive their two-wheel-drive motor home on unpaved roads; Apollo and Hertz do not, while Britz and Maui do allow two-wheel-drive campers to travel on unsealed access roads to recognized campgrounds.

Frustratingly, most local councils take a dim view of "free camping," the practice of pulling over by the roadside to camp for the night. Instead, you will likely have to stay in a campground.

## ON THE ROAD

**GAS** The price of petrol (gasoline) will probably elicit a cry of dismay from Americans and a whoop of delight from Brits. Prices go up and down, but roughly, you're looking at around A90¢ a liter (or US$2.72 per U.S. gal.) for unleaded petrol in Sydney and A$1.20 a liter (or US$3.62 per U.S. gal.), or more, in the Outback. One U.S. gallon equals 3.78 liters. Most rental cars take unleaded gas, and motor homes run on diesel, which costs around A90¢ to A$1.20 a liter (US$2.72–US$3.62 per U.S. gal.), depending on your location.

**DRIVING RULES** Australians drive on the left, which means you give way to the right. Left turns on a red light are not permitted unless a sign says so.

Roundabouts (traffic circles) are common at intersections; approach these slowly enough to stop if you have to, and give way to all traffic on the roundabout. Flash your indicator as you leave the roundabout (even if you're going straight, because technically that's a left turn).

The only strange driving rule is Melbourne's requirement that drivers turn right from the left lane at certain intersections in the city center. This allows the city's trams to carry on uninterrupted in the right lane. Pull into the left lane opposite the street you are turning into, and make the turn when the traffic light in the street you are turning into becomes green. These intersections are signposted.

The maximum permitted blood alcohol level when driving is 0.05%, which equals approximately two 200-milliliter (6.6 fl. oz.) drinks in the first hour for men, one for women, and one drink per hour for both sexes after that. The police set up random breath-testing units (RBTs) in cunningly disguised and unlikely places all the time, so getting caught is easy. You will face a court appearance if you do.

The speed limit is 50kmph (31 mph) or 60kmph (37 mph) in urban areas and 100kmph (62 mph) or 110kmph (68 mph) in most country areas. Speed-limit signs are black numbers circled in red on a white background.

Drivers and passengers, including taxi passengers, must wear a seat belt at all times when the vehicle is moving forward, if the car is equipped with a belt. Young children are required to sit in the rear seat in a child-safety seat or harness; car-rental companies will rent these to you, but be sure to book them. Tell the taxi company you have a child when you book a cab so that it can send a car with the right restraints.

**MAPS** The maps published by the state automobile clubs listed below in "Auto Clubs" will likely be free if you are a member of an affiliated auto club in your home country. None will mail them to you overseas; pick them up on arrival. Remember to bring your auto-club membership card to qualify for discounts or free maps.

Two of the biggest map publishers in Australia are **HEMA Maps** (✆ **07/3340 0000;** www.hemamaps.com.au) and **Universal Publishers** (✆ **1800/021 987** in Australia, or 02/9857 3700; www.universalpress-online.com). Both publish an extensive range of national, state, regional, and city maps. HEMA has a strong list of regional maps ("Gold Coast and Region" and "The Red Centre" are just a few), while Universal produces a complete range of street directories by city, region, or state under the "UBD" and "Gregory's" labels. HEMA produces four-wheel-drive and motorbike road atlases and many regional four-wheel-drive maps—good if you plan to go off the trails—an atlas of Australia's national parks, and maps to Kakadu and Lamington national parks.

Both companies produce a range of national road atlases. Universal's UBD *Motoring Atlas of Australia* helpfully publishes street maps of small regional towns in each state. Australia is so big that a national atlas is good for overall trip planning and long-distance or interstate journeys, but sometimes of limited use on day trips or short journeys because it is not detailed enough. You may find it worthwhile to purchase a map to the local area—say, a "Cairns to Cooktown" map if you want to explore Cairns, Kuranda, Port Douglas, and other towns within an hour or two of Cairns.

HEMA and Universal Press maps are distributed in the United States by **Map Link** (✆ **800/962-1394;** www.maplink.com). HEMA Maps are also distributed in Canada, by **ITMB,** or International Travel Maps and Books (✆ **604/879-3621;** www.itmb.com), and in the U.K. by **Estate Publications** (✆ **01580/764225;** www.estate-publications.co.uk).

In Australia, auto clubs (see below), bigger newsdealers, and bookstores are your best sources for maps. Gas stations stock a limited range relating to their location, and visitor information centers sometimes stock a range of maps to the area and the whole state.

**ROAD SIGNS** Australians navigate by road name, not road number. The easiest way to get where you're going is to familiarize yourself with the major towns along your route and follow the signs toward them.

**AUTO CLUBS** Every state and territory has its own auto club. Your auto association back home probably has a reciprocal agreement with Australian clubs, which may entitle you to free maps, accommodations guides, and emergency roadside assistance. Don't forget to bring your membership card.

Even if you're not a member, the clubs are a good source of advice on local traffic regulations, touring, road conditions, traveling in remote areas, and any other motoring questions. They sell maps, accommodations guides, and camping guides to non-members at reasonable prices. They share a website: **www.aaa.asn.au**. You can drop into numerous regional offices as well as the head office locations listed here.

- **New South Wales & ACT: National Roads and Motorists' Association (NRMA),** 74–76 King St. (at George St.), Sydney, NSW 2000 (✆ **13 11 22** in New South Wales, or 02/9292 9222).
- **Victoria: Royal Automobile Club of Victoria (RACV),** 550 Princes Hwy., Noble Park, VIC 3174 (✆ **13 19 55** in Australia, or 03/9790 2211). A more convenient city office is at 422 Little Collins St., Melbourne.
- **Queensland: Royal Automobile Club of Queensland (RACQ),** 300 St. Pauls Terrace, Fortitude Valley, QLD 4006 (✆ **13 19 05** in Australia, or 07/3872 8429). A more convenient city office is in the General Post Office (GPO) building, 261 Queen St., Brisbane (✆ **07/3872 8465**).
- **Western Australia: Royal Automobile Club of WA (RAC),** 228 Adelaide Terrace, Perth, WA 6000 (✆ **13 17 03** or 08/9421 4444).
- **South Australia: Royal Automobile Association of South Australia (RAA),** 41 Hindmarsh Sq., Adelaide, SA 5000 (✆ **08/8202 4600**).
- **Northern Territory: Automobile Association of the Northern Territory (AANT),** 79–81 Smith St., Darwin, NT 0800 (✆ **08/8981 3837**).
- **Tasmania: Royal Automobile Club of Tasmania (RACT),** corner of Murray and Patrick streets, Hobart, TAS 7000 (✆ **13 27 22** in Tasmania, or 03/6232 6300).

## ROAD CONDITIONS & SAFETY

**FATIGUE** Fatigue is a killer on Australia's roads. The rule is to take a 20-minute break every 2 hours, even if you don't feel tired. In some states, "driver reviver" stations operate on major roads during holiday periods. They serve free tea, coffee, and cookies, and are often at roadside picnic areas that have restrooms.

**KANGAROOS & OTHER WILDLIFE** It's a sad fact, but kangaroos are a road hazard. Avoid driving in country areas between dusk and dawn, when 'roos are most active. If you hit one, stop and check its pouch for live joeys (baby kangaroos) because females usually have one in the pouch. Wrap the joey tightly in a towel or old sweater, don't feed or overhandle it, and take it to a vet in the nearest town or call one of the following wildlife care groups: **Wildlife Information & Rescue Service (WIRES)** in New South Wales (✆ 02/8977 3333); **Wildlife Victoria** (✆ 0500/540 000 or 03/9663 9211); **Wildlife Rescue** in Queensland (✆ 0418/792 598); **RSPCA Wildlife** in the ACT (✆ 02/6287 8100 or 0413/495 031); **Wildcare** in Western Australia (✆ 08/9474 9055); **Wildlife Rescue** in the Northern Territory (✆ 08/8999 4536); **Fauna Rescue of S.A.** (✆ 08/8289 0896) in South Australia; or **Wildcare** in Tasmania (✆ 03/6233 2852). Most vets will treat native wildlife free.

Some highways run through unfenced stations (ranches), where sheep and cattle pose a threat. Cattle like to rest on the warm bitumen road at night, so put your lights on high to spot them. If an animal does loom up, slow down—but never swerve, or you may roll. If you have to, hit it. Tell ranchers within 24 hours if you have hit their livestock.

Car-rental companies will not insure for animal damage to the car, which should give you an inkling of how common an occurrence this is.

**ROAD TRAINS** Road trains consist of as many as three big truck carriages linked together to make a "train" up to 54m (177 ft.) long. If you're in front of one, give the driver plenty of warning when you brake because the trains need a lot of distance to slow down. Allow at least 1 clear km (over ½ mile) before you pass one, but don't expect the driver to

make it easy—"truckies" are notorious for their lack of concern for motorists.

**UNPAVED ROADS** Many country roads are unsealed (unpaved). They are usually bone-dry, which makes them more slippery than they look, so travel at a moderate speed—35kmph (22 mph) is not too cautious, and anything over 60kmph (37 mph) is dangerous. Don't overcorrect if you veer to one side. Keep well behind any vehicles because the dust they throw up can block your vision.

**FLOODS** Floods are common in the Top End and north of Cairns from November or December through March or April (the Wet season). Never cross a flooded road unless you are sure of its depth. Crocodiles may be in the water, so do not wade in to test it! Fast-flowing water is dangerous, even if it's very shallow. When in doubt, stay where you are and wait for the water to drop; most flash floods subside in 24 hours. Check the road conditions ahead at least once a day in the Wet season.

**RUNNING OUT OF GAS** Gas stations (also called "roadhouses" in rural areas) can be few and far between in the Outback, so fill up at every opportunity.

## WHAT IF YOUR VEHICLE BREAKS DOWN?

***Warning:*** If you break down or get lost, never leave your vehicle. Many a motorist—often an Aussie who should have known better—has died wandering off on a crazy quest for help or water, knowing full well that neither is to be found for maybe hundreds of miles. Most people who get lost do so in Outback spots; if that happens to you, conserve your body moisture by doing as little as possible and staying in the shade of your car. Put out distress signals in patterns of three—three yells, three columns of smoke, and so on. The traditional Outback call for help is "Coo-*ee,*" with the accent on the "ee" and yodeled in a high pitch; the sound travels a surprisingly long way.

The state auto clubs listed above provide free emergency assistance to members of many affiliated automobile associations around the world.

## EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE

The emergency breakdown assistance telephone number for every Australian auto club is ✆ **13 11 11** from anywhere in Australia. It is billed as a local call. If you are not a member of an auto club at home that has a reciprocal agreement with the Australian clubs, you'll have to join the Australian club on the spot before the club will tow or repair your car. This usually costs only around A$80 (US$64), not a big price to pay when you're stranded—although in the Outback, the charge may be considerably higher. Most car-rental companies also have emergency assistance numbers.

## TIPS FOR FOUR-WHEEL DRIVERS

Always keep to the four-wheel-drive track. Going off-road causes soil erosion, a significant environmental problem in Australia. Leave gates as you found them. Obtain permission from the owners before venturing onto private station (ranch) roads. On an extended trip or in remote areas, carry 5 liters (5 qt.) of drinking water per person per day (dehydration occurs fast in the Australian heat); enough food to last 3 or 4 days more than you think you will need; a first-aid kit; spare fuel; a jack and two spare tires; spare fan belts, radiator hoses, and air-conditioner hoses; a tow rope; and a good map that marks all gas stations. In seriously remote areas outside the scope of this book, carry a high-frequency and CB radio. (A cellphone may not work in the Outback.) Advise a friend, your hotel manager, the local tourist bureau, or a police station of your route and your expected time of return or arrival at your destination.

## 18 Tips on Accommodations

Accommodations properties in Australia carry star ratings given by AAA Tourism, which has been awarding ratings since the 1950s. This independent assessment is based on facilities, amenities, maintenance, and cleanliness. Ratings run from one to five stars. Stars are featured in AAA Tourism guides, and recent research shows 70% of travelers use the star ratings when choosing their accommodations (these star ratings are noted below using asterisks). The rating scheme covers over 18,000 accommodations throughout every state and territory.

* Offers a basic standard of accommodations, simply furnished, with a resident manager.

** Similar standard to one star but offers more comfort and value with additional features. These are well-maintained properties offering an average standard of accommodations with average furnishings, bedding, and floor coverings.

*** Well appointed, with a comfortable standard of accommodations, and above-average furnishings and floor coverings.

**** Exceptionally well-appointed establishments with high-quality furnishings, a high degree of comfort, high standard of presentation, and guest services.

***** International standard establishments offering superior appointments, furnishings, and decor, with an extensive range of first-class guest services. Reception, room service, and housekeeping available 18 hours a day, with restaurant/bistro facilities available 7 nights a week. A number and variety of room styles, suites, or both are available. Choice of dining facilities, 24-hour room service, housekeeping, and valet parking. Porter and concierge service available, as well as a dedicated business center and conference facilities.

***Note:*** All accommodations listed in this book have private bathrooms unless otherwise noted.

**HOTELS** It's a rare hotel room that does not have reverse-cycle air-conditioning for heating and cooling, a telephone, a color TV, a clock radio, a minifridge (if not a minibar), an iron and ironing board, and self-serve coffee and tea. Private bathrooms are standard, although they often have only a shower, not a tub.

The largest hotel group in Australia is the French chain Accor, which has more than 100 properties (that's about 15,000 rooms) under its Sofitel, Novotel, Mercure, All Seasons, Ibis, and Formule 1 brands. Many other international chains, such as Marriott, Sheraton, and Hilton, have properties in Australia.

**SERVICED APARTMENTS** Serviced apartments are favored by many Aussie families and business travelers. You get a fully furnished apartment with one, two, or three bedrooms, a living room, a kitchen or kitchenette, a laundry, and often two bathrooms—in other words, all the facilities of a hotel suite and more, often for less than the cost of a four-star hotel room. (Not every apartment kitchen has a dishwasher, so check if that's important to you.) A nice two-bedroom apartment can cost anywhere from around A$165 to A$695 (US$132–US$556) a night, depending on your location and the season. Australia's apartment inventory is enormous and ranges from clean and comfortable, if a little dated, to luxurious. Most apartments can be rented for 1 night, especially in cities, but in popular vacation spots, some proprietors will insist on a minimum 3-night stay, or even a week in high season.

**Medina Serviced Apartments** (✆ **1300/300 232** in Australia, or 02/9356 1000; www.medinaapartments.com.au) has a chain of midrange to upscale properties in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Canberra, Adelaide, and Perth. Australia's biggest apartment chain is **Quest Serviced Apartments** (✆ **1800/334 033** in Australia, 0800/944 400 in New Zealand, or 03/9645 7566; www.questapartments.com.au). It has four brands: the upscale Quest Establishments, the midrange Quest Inns, Quest Lodgings for longer stays, and Quest Resorts, in every state and territory.

**MOTELS & MOTOR INNS** Australia's plentiful motels are neat and clean, if often a little dated. You can count on them to provide air-conditioning, a telephone, a color TV, a clock radio, a minifridge or minibar, and self-serve tea and coffee. Most have only showers, not bathtubs. Some have restaurants attached, and many have swimming pools. Motor inns offer a greater range of facilities and a generally higher standard of rooms than motels. Rates average A$70 to A$110 (US$56–US$88) for a double.

**BED & BREAKFAST INNS** B&Bs are cheap and plentiful in Australia. It is easy to find charming rooms for around A$80 (US$64) for a double. Bathroom facilities are often shared, although more properties now offer private, if not always en-suite (attached), bathrooms.

Travel agents rarely list B&Bs because the establishments are not big enough to pay a commission, so they can be hard to find. A good source is *The Australian Bed & Breakfast Book* (published in the U.S. by Pelican USA; www.bbbook.com.au), which lists more than 500 B&Bs across Australia. Although the B&Bs pay to be in the book, they have to meet standards set by the editors. The entire book is posted on the website, and in Australia, it's widely available in bookshops and newsdealers, or you can order it direct (✆ **02/6658 5701**) for A$20 (US$16) plus A$15 (US$12) for overseas postage.

Orangewood, a Northern Territory B&B, provides an index of Australian B&B directories at this address: **www.bed-and-breakfast.au.com/dirdir.htm**.

**PUBS** Aussie pubs are really made for drinking, not spending the night, but many offer rooms upstairs, usually with shared bathroom facilities. Because most pubs are decades old, the rooms may be either old-fashioned or just plain old. Pub accommodations are dying out in the cities but still common in the country. Australians are rowdy drinkers, so sleeping over the bar can be hellishly noisy, but the pub's saving grace is incredibly low rates. Most charge per person, not per room, and you will rarely pay more than A$50 (US$40) per person a night.

**HOUSE SWAPS** Many international visitors to Australia have happily swapped homes with locals using the Internet to find their "perfect match." A plethora of sites can help you make your search. Two that list up to 100 Australian homes each are www.holi-swaps.com/swapsau.htm and www.homebase-hols.com. You can browse the listings free, but it costs around US$40 to view the contact details or to list your own home.

**FARM STAYS** The Aussie answer to the dude ranch is a farm stay. Australian farm stays are rarely as well set up for tourists as the dude ranch Billy Crystal's character visited in *City Slickers.* Most are farms first, tourist operations second, so you may have to find your own fun and know how to take care of yourself, at least to a degree. Accommodations on farms can be anything from a basic bunkhouse (ask if it's air-conditioned because most farms are in very hot areas) to rustically luxurious digs. Do some research on your farm—a lot of activities are seasonal, some farmers will not allow you to get

### Tips Meet the People Down Under

If you want to see an Australian Rules football game in the company of a knowledgeable local in Melbourne or swim at Bondi Beach with a Sydneysider, contact **Friends Overseas—Australia** (✆ **718/261-0534;** www.friendsoverseas.org). This program is designed to match visitors with friendly Aussies of like age and interests, so you can spend time with them. The membership fee is US$25.

involved in dangerous work, not all will offer horseback riding, and *farm* means different things in different parts of Australia. If you like green fields and dairy cows, Victoria may be the place for you. If checking fences on a dusty 500,000-hectare (200,000-acre) Outback station (ranch) sounds wildly romantic, head to Western Australia or the Northern Territory.

**Australian Farm & Country Tourism** (✆ **1800/803 007** or 02/9493 9955; www.farmstaysaustralia.com) is a cooperative marketing organization for farm-stay properties. Its website has information on about 40 properties in Queensland, New South Wales, and Victoria. Another good contact is **Bed & Breakfast and Farmstay Victoria** (✆ **1300/132 358** or 03/9431 5417; www.agv.net.au). Rates vary, but you will find many properties charging under A$200 (US$160) for a double, which sometimes includes breakfast. Meals are often available as an optional extra.

**YOUTH HOSTELS & BACKPACKER LODGES** Australia has oodles of backpacker hostels. Some are little more than grim dormitories (without air-conditioning); others are spiffy new complexes with cheerily painted rooms, a pool, tour desk, restaurant and bar, communal kitchens, and Internet access. If you like the idea of traveling cheap but aren't wild about bunking with strangers, opt for one of the many that offer private double rooms or family rooms. Some hostels will impose a maximum stay of 3 nights, others are happy to accommodate you for a week or more. Blankets and pillows are provided, but you may need to rent bed linens for a few extra dollars per stay; bring your own towel. Look for hostels that have lockers, as the backpacker circuit has more than its fair share of petty thieves. Hostels typically charge around A$20 (US$16) per dorm bed per night, and A$40 to A$50 (US$32–US$40) for a twin/double private room. Private rooms are in demand, so book ahead.

The **Australian Youth Hostels Association (YHA),** 422 Kent St., Sydney, NSW 2000 (✆ **02/9261 1111;** fax 02/9261 1969; www.yha.com.au) is the Australian arm of Hostelling International and has more than 140 hostels in Australia. People of any age can stay at them. Quality and facilities vary, but YHA hostels are clean and have communal kitchens and 24-hour access. You don't have to join the association to stay at a hostel, but members receive discounted rates and are entitled to other discounts—on car rental, bus travel, and tours, for example—that can more the cover the membership fee.

In the United States, contact **Hostelling International/American Youth Hostels,** 8401 Colesville Rd., Suite 600, Silver Spring, MD 20910 (✆ 202/783 6161; www.hihostels.com) or join at any hostel in the United States. In Canada, contact **Hostelling International-Canada,** 205 Catherine St., Suite 400, Ottawa, Ontario, K2P 1C3 (✆ 613/237-7884; www.hihostels.ca). In the U.K., contact **Youth Hostels Association (England and Wales),**

Trevelyan House, Dimple Rd., Matlock, Derbyshire, DE4 3YH (✆ 1629/592 700; www.yha.org.uk). In Scotland, contact the **Scottish Youth Hostels Association,** 7 Glebe Crescent, Stirling FK8 2JA (✆ 1786/891 400; www.syha.org.uk). In Northern Ireland, contact **Hostelling International-Northern Ireland,** 22 Donegall Rd., Belfast BT12 5JN (✆ 28/9032 4733; www.hini.org.uk); in the Republic of Ireland, contact the **Irish Youth Hostels Association,** 61 Mountjoy St., Dublin 7 (✆ 3531/830 4555; www.anoige.ie). All of these offices are accessible at www.hihostels.com. ***Note:*** YHA properties are nonsmoking.

**YWCA** has comfortable budget hotels in Sydney (✆ **1800/994 994** in Australia), Melbourne (✆ **1800/468 359** in Australia, or 02/9264 2451), and Darwin (✆ **08/8981 8644**) with private rooms, dorms, and family rooms. Rates range from around A$20 (US$16) for a dorm bed or A$55 to A$140 (US$44–US$112) for a double.

**CAMPING & CARAVAN PARKS**

Australians camp year-round, even in remote desert outposts and in winter. The only places you might want to avoid are Tasmania and the mountainous areas of New South Wales and Victoria in winter, when it's a bit nippy, and the Top End in the summer Wet season.

Campsites are attached to nearly all the country's numerous caravan (camper) parks, and many lodges offer associated campgrounds. Camping in national parks does entail some restrictions. You can camp only at designated campsites, and sometimes bookings may be required 24 hours in advance. Open fires are often banned, so you will need to rely on a gas barbecue or, if none is supplied, your own camping stove. Expect to pay about A$6 to A$8 (US$4.80–US$6.40) per adult in a tent, around A$10 (US$8) per adult for a powered campsite, and about half price for kids. Definitely book ahead during school vacations and peak season.

## SAVING ON YOUR HOTEL ROOM

The **rack rate** is the maximum rate that a hotel charges for a room. Hardly anybody pays this price, however, except in high season or on holidays. To lower the cost of your room:

- **Ask about special rates or other discounts.** Always ask whether a room less expensive than the first one quoted is available or whether any special rates apply to you. You may qualify for corporate, student, military, senior, or other discounts. Mention membership in AAA, AARP, frequent-flier programs, or trade unions, which may entitle you to special deals as well. Find out the hotel policy on children—do kids stay free in the room or is there a special rate?
- **Dial direct.** When booking a room in a chain hotel, you'll often get a better deal by calling the individual hotel's reservation desk rather than the chain's main number.
- **Book online.** Many hotels offer Internet-only discounts or supply rooms to Priceline, Hotwire, or Expedia at rates much lower than the ones you can get through the hotel itself. Shop around. And if you have special needs—a quiet room, a room with a view—call the hotel directly and make your needs known after you've booked online.
- **Remember the law of supply and demand.** Resort hotels are most crowded and therefore most expensive on weekends, so discounts are usually available for midweek stays. Business hotels in downtown locations are busiest during the week, so you can expect big discounts over the weekend. Many hotels have high-season and low-season prices, and booking

the day after high season ends can mean big discounts.

- **Look into group or long-stay discounts.** If you come as part of a large group, you should be able to negotiate a bargain rate, since the hotel can then guarantee occupancy in a number of rooms. Likewise, if you're planning a long stay (at least 5 days), you might qualify for a discount. As a general rule, expect 1 night free after a 7-night stay.
- **Avoid excess charges and hidden costs.** When you book a room, ask whether the hotel charges for parking. Use your own cellphone, pay phones, or prepaid phone cards instead of dialing direct from hotel phones, which usually have exorbitant rates. And don't be tempted by the room's minibar offerings: Most hotels charge through the nose for water, soda, and snacks. Finally, ask about local taxes and service charges, which can increase the cost of a room by 15% or more. If a hotel insists upon tacking on a surprise "energy surcharge" that wasn't mentioned at check-in or a "resort fee" for amenities you didn't use, you can often make a case for getting it removed.
- Consider the pros and cons of **all-inclusive** resorts and hotels. The term "all-inclusive" means different things at different hotels. Many all-inclusive hotels will include three meals daily, sports equipment, spa entry, and other amenities; others may include all or most drinks. In general, you'll save money going the "all-inclusive" way—as long as you use the facilities provided. The down side is that your choices are limited and you're stuck eating and playing in one place for the duration of your vacation.
- **Book an efficiency.** A room with a kitchenette allows you to shop for groceries and cook your own meals. This is a big money saver, especially for families on long stays.

## 19 Tips on Dining

One of the richest gifts that Australia's multicultural society has brought is the cuisine. In the last couple of decades, both restaurants and home tables have undergone massive change as traditional English-style fare of meat-and-three-veg has given way to a blend of flavors and styles known as "Mod Oz." Asian, European, and Middle Eastern flavors are here to stay, and some places you'll find a touch of "bush tucker," based on traditional Aboriginal foods. For more information on Australian fare, see "Witchetty Grubs, Lilli-Pillies & Other Good Eats" in appendix A.

To go with it, you can't go past Australia's great wines. The first grape vines arrived with the First Fleet in 1788, and today more than 550 major companies and small winemakers produce wine commercially. Australian vintages consistently beat competitors from around the world in major international shows.

Australian wines are generally named after the grape varieties from which they are made. Of the white wines, both the fruity chardonnay and Riesling varieties; the "herbaceous," or "grassy" sauvignon blanc; and the dry semillon are favorites. Of the reds, the dry cabernet sauvignon, the merlot, the burgundy-type pinot noir, and the big, bold shiraz come out tops.

If your style runs more to the "amber nectar"—and there's nothing better than a cold beer on a hot day—you'll need to get the lingo right. A can of beer is a "tinnie," a small bottle is a "stubby," and a tall bottle is a "tallie." In the hotter climes, you may be offered a polystyrene container or "stubby holder" in which to place your beer to keep it cool.

In New South Wales, beer is served by the glass in a "schooner" and a smaller "midi"—though in a few places it's also sold in British measurements, by pints and half pints. In Victoria you should ask for a "pot," or the less copious "glass." In South Australia a "schooner" is the size of a NSW "midi," and in Western Australia a "midi" is the same size as a New South Wales midi, but a glass about half its size is called a "pony." Confused? Just use your hands to show whether you want a small glass or a larger one. Your accent will alert bartenders they are dealing with the uninitiated.

Australian beers vary considerably in quality, and there's no accounting for tastes. Among the most popular are Victoria Bitter (known as "VB"), XXXX (pronounced "four ex"), Fosters, and brews produced by the Tooheys company. All are popular in cans, bottles, or on tap. Cascade, a German-style beer that you will usually find only in a bottle, is also popular. It's light in color, strong in taste, and made from Tasmanian water straight off a mountain. If you want to get plastered, try Coopers—it's rather cloudy, very strong, and usually causes a fierce hangover. Most Australian beers range from 4.8% to 5.2% alcohol.

Tipping is not widely expected in Australia, but it is usual to tip around 5% to 10% or round up to the nearest A$10 (US$8) for a substantial meal in a good restaurant.

## 20 Recommended Books & Films

Australian literature has come a long way since the days when the bush poets A. B. "Banjo" Paterson and Henry Lawson penned their odes to a way of life now largely lost. The best known of these is Paterson's epic *The Man from Snowy River* (Buccaneer Books, 1996), which hit the bestseller list in 1895 and was made into a film released in 1982. But the literary scene has always been lively, and Australia has a wealth of classics, many of them with the Outback at their heart.

A good historical account of the early days is Geoffrey Blainey's *The Tyranny of Distance* (Pan Macmillan, 1977), first published in 1966. Robert Hughes's *The Fatal Shore: The Epic of Australia's Founding* (Vintage Books, 1988) is a bestselling non-fiction study of the country's early days. For a contemporary, if somewhat dark, take on the settlement and development of Sydney, delve into John Birmingham's *Leviathan* (Random House, 1999). From an Aboriginal perspective, *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence* (University of Queensland Press, 1997) by Doris Pilkington tells the true story of three young girls from the "Stolen Generation" who ran away from a mission school to return to their families (there's also a 2002 film based on the book).

Modern novelists include David Malouf, Elizabeth Jolley, Helen Garner, Sue Woolfe, and Peter Carey, whose *True History of the Kelly Gang* (Vintage Books, 2001), a fictionalized autobiography of the outlaw Ned Kelly, won the Booker Prize in 2001. West Australian Tim Winton evokes his part of the continent in stunning prose; his novel, *Dirt Music* (Scribner, 2002), is no exception.

Outsiders who have tackled Australia include Jan Morris and Bill Bryson. Morris's *Sydney* (Viking) was published in 1992, and Bryson's *In a Sunburned Country* (Broadway Books, 2001), while not always a favorite with Australians, may appeal to American readers.

## *FAST FACTS:* Australia

***American Express*** For all travel-related customer inquiries regarding any American Express service, including reporting a lost card, call ✆ **1300/132 639.** To report lost or stolen traveler's checks, call ✆ **1800/251 902.**

***Area Codes*** See "Telephones," below.

***Business Hours*** Banks are open Monday through Thursday from 9:30am to 4pm, Friday 9:30am to 5pm. General business hours are Monday through Friday from 8:30am to 5:30pm. Shopping hours are usually 8:30am to 5:30pm weekdays and 9am to 4 or 5pm on Saturday. Many shops close on Sunday, although major department stores and shops in tourist precincts are open 7 days a week.

***Car Rentals*** See "Getting Around Australia," p. 66.

***Currency*** See "Money," p. 32.

***Drugstores*** These are called "chemist shops" or "pharmacies." Australian pharmacists are permitted to fill only prescriptions written by Australian doctors.

***Electricity*** The current is 240 volts AC, 50 hertz. Sockets take two or three flat, not rounded, prongs. North Americans and Europeans will need to buy a converter before they leave home (don't wait until you get to Australia because Australian stores are likely to stock only converters for Aussie appliances to fit American and European outlets). Some large hotels have 110V outlets (or dual voltage) for electric shavers, and some will lend converters, but don't count on it in smaller, less expensive hotels, motels, or B&Bs. Power does not start automatically when you plug in an appliance; you need to flick the switch beside the socket to the on position.

***Embassies & Consulates*** Most diplomatic posts are in Canberra: **British High Commission,** Commonwealth Avenue, Canberra, ACT 2600 (✆ 02/6270 6666); **Embassy of Ireland,** 20 Arkana St., Yarralumla, ACT 2600 (✆ 02/6273 3022); **High Commission of Canada,** Commonwealth Avenue, Yarralumla, ACT 2600 (✆ 02/6270 4000); **New Zealand High Commission,** Commonwealth Avenue, Canberra, ACT 2600 (✆ 02/6270 4211); and the **United States Embassy,** 21 Moonah Place, Yarralumla, ACT 2600 (✆ 02/6214 5600). Embassies or consulates with posts in state capitals are listed in "Fast Facts" in the relevant state chapters of this book.

***Emergencies*** Dial ✆ **000** anywhere in Australia for police, ambulance, or the fire department. This is a free call from public and private telephones and needs no coins. The TTY emergency number is ✆ **106.**

***Holidays*** See "Australia Calendar of Events," earlier in this chapter.

***Information*** See "Visitor Information," earlier in this chapter.

***Internet Access*** Internet access is available just about everywhere, including some of the smallest Outback towns, which generally have at least one cybercafe, coin-operated machines, or both. Coin-op terminals are also available at larger airports. Major tourist towns such as Darwin and Cairns sometimes have whole streets full of cybercafes.

***Liquor Laws*** Hours vary from pub to pub, but most are open daily from around 10am or noon to 10pm or midnight. The minimum drinking age is 18.

Random breath tests to catch drunk drivers are common, and drunk-driving laws are strictly enforced. Getting caught drunk behind the wheel will mean a court appearance, not just a fine. The maximum permitted blood alcohol level is 0.05%. Alcohol is sold in liquor stores, in the "bottle shops" attached to every pub, and in supermarkets in some states.

***Lost & Found*** Be sure to tell all of your credit card companies the minute you discover your wallet has been lost or stolen and file a report at the nearest police precinct. Your credit card company or insurer may require a police report number or record of the loss. Most credit card companies have an emergency toll-free number to call if your card is lost or stolen; they may be able to wire you a cash advance immediately or deliver an emergency credit card in a day or two. Visa's U.S. emergency number is ✆ **800/847-2911** or 410/581-9994. American Express cardholders and traveler's check holders should call ✆ **800/221-7282.** MasterCard holders should call ✆ **800/307-7309** or 636/722-7111. For other credit cards, call the toll-free number directory at ✆ **800/555-1212.**

In Australia, call toll-free: **American Express** (✆ 1300/132 639), **MasterCard** (✆ 1800/120 113), and **Visa** (✆ 1800/125 440). American Express cardholders and traveler's check holders should call ✆ 800/992-3404. MasterCard holders should call ✆ 800/MC-ASSIST or 636/722-7111. For other credit cards, call the toll-free number directory at ✆ 800/555-1212.

If you need emergency cash over the weekend when all banks and American Express offices are closed, you can have money wired to you via **Western Union** (✆ **800/325-6000;** www.westernunion.com).

Identity theft or fraud are potential complications of losing your wallet, especially if you've lost your driver's license along with your cash and credit cards. Notify the major credit-reporting bureaus immediately; placing a fraud alert on your records may protect you against liability for criminal activity. The three major U.S. credit-reporting agencies are **Equifax** (✆ **800/766-0008;** www.equifax.com), **Experian** (✆ **888/397-3742;** www.experian.com), and **TransUnion** (✆ **800/680-7289;** www.transunion.com). Finally, if you've lost all forms of photo ID call your airline and explain the situation; they might allow you to board the plane if you have a copy of your passport or birth certificate and a copy of the police report you've filed.

***Mail*** A postcard costs A$1.10 (US88¢) to the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, or New Zealand. It cost A$1.20 (US95¢) to send a 50-gram (1.76-oz.) letter by airmail to New Zealand, A$1.80 (US$1.45) to the United States, Canada, or the United Kingdom. To mail a 500-gram (17.6-oz.) parcel to New Zealand, it costs A$9 (US$7.20); to the United States or Canada, A$13 (US$10.40); to the United Kingdom, A$15.50 (US$12.40).

***Maps*** Newsdealers, auto clubs, and bookstores are your best sources for maps (see "Getting Around Australia," p. 66).

***Newspapers & Magazines*** The national daily newspaper is *The Australian,* which publishes an expanded edition with a color magazine on Saturday. Most capital cities have their own daily papers, usually a tabloid and a broadsheet. The Australian current-affairs magazine, *The Bulletin with Newsweek,* is published weekly, and there is an Australian edition of *Time.*

***Passports*** **For Residents of the United States:** Whether you're applying in person or by mail, you can download passport applications from the U.S. State Department website at **http://travel.state.gov/passport/passport_1738.html**. To find your regional passport office, either check the U.S. State Department website or call the **National Passport Information Center** toll-free number (✆ **877/487-2778**) for automated information.

**For Residents of Canada:** Passport applications are available at travel agencies throughout Canada or from the central **Passport Office,** Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, Ottawa, ON K1A 0G3 (✆ **800/567-6868;** www.ppt.gc.ca).

**For Residents of the United Kingdom:** To pick up an application for a standard 10-year passport (5-year passport for children under 16), visit your nearest passport office, major post office, or travel agency, or contact the **United Kingdom Passport Service** at ✆ **0870/521-0410** or search its website at www.ukpa.gov.uk.

**For Residents of Ireland:** You can apply for a 10-year passport at the **Passport Office,** Setanta Centre, Molesworth Street, Dublin 2 (✆ **01/671-1633;** www.irlgov.ie/iveagh). Those under age 18 and over 65 must apply for a €12 3-year passport. You can also apply at 1A South Mall, Cork (✆ **021/272-525**) or at most main post offices.

**For Residents of New Zealand:** You can pick up a passport application at any New Zealand Passports Office or download it from their website. Contact the **Passports Office** at ✆ **0800/225-050** in New Zealand or 04/474-8100, or log on to www.passports.govt.nz.

***Pets*** Leave 'em at home. You will be back home planning your next vacation before Fluffy clears quarantine Down Under.

***Police*** Dial ✆ **000** anywhere in Australia. This is a free call from public and private telephones and requires no coins.

***Safety*** Violent crime is uncommon, and the political situation is stable. Guns are strictly controlled. Purse-snatchers are the same threat they are all over the world. See "Health & Safety," earlier in this chapter.

***Smoking*** Smoking in most public areas, such as museums, cinemas, and theaters, is restricted or banned. Smoking in restaurants may be limited—Western Australia and New South Wales ban it altogether, and in many other states, restaurants have smoking and nonsmoking sections. Pubs and clubs, for a long time the last bastion for smokers, are also heading for total bans. These will be introduced from January 2006 in Tasmania and from July 2006 in Queensland and Western Australia. Victoria and New South Wales will go the same way in 2007. Australian aircraft on all routes are completely nonsmoking, as are all airport buildings.

***Taxes*** Australia applies a 10% Goods and Services Tax (GST) on most products and services. Your international airline tickets to Australia are not taxed, nor are domestic airline tickets for travel within Australia *if you bought them outside Australia.* If you buy Australian airline tickets once you arrive in Australia, you will pay GST on them.

Through the Tourist Refund Scheme (TRS), Australians and international visitors can claim a refund of the GST (and of a 14.5% wine tax called Wine

Equalisation Tax, or WET) paid on a purchase of more than A$300 (US$240) from a single outlet, within the last 30 days before you leave. More than one item may be included in that A$300. For example, you can claim the GST you paid on 10 T-shirts each worth A$30 (US$24), as long as they were bought from a single store. Do this as you leave by presenting your receipt or "tax invoice" to the Australian Customs Service's TRS booths, located beyond passport control in the international-terminal departure areas at most airports. If you buy several things on different days from one store, which together add up to A$300 or more, you must ask the store to total all purchases on one tax invoice (or receipt)—now there's a nice piece of bureaucracy to remember Australia by! Pack the items in your carry-on baggage because you must show them to Customs. You can use the goods before you leave Australia and still claim the refund, but you cannot claim a refund on things you have consumed (film you use, say, or food). You cannot claim a refund on alcohol other than wine. Allow an extra 15 minutes to stand in line at the airport and get your refund.

You can also claim a refund if you leave Australia as a cruise passenger from Circular Quay or Darling Harbour in Sydney, Cairns, Darwin, Hobart, or Fremantle (Perth). If your cruise departs from elsewhere in Australia, or if you are flying out from an airport other than Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide, Cairns, Perth, Darwin, or the Gold Coast, telephone the **Australian Customs Service** (✆ **1300/363 263** in Australia, or 02/6275 6666) to see if you can still claim the refund.

Items bought in duty-free stores will not be charged GST. Nor will items you export—such as an Aboriginal painting that you buy in a gallery in Alice Springs and have shipped straight to your home outside Australia.

Basic groceries are not GST-taxed, but restaurant meals are.

Other taxes include departure tax of A$38 (US$30) for every passenger 12 years and over, included in the price of your airline ticket when you buy it in your home country; landing and departure taxes at some airports, also included in the price of your ticket; and "reef tax," officially dubbed the Environmental Management Charge, of A$4.50 (US$3.60) for every person over the age of 4 every time he or she enters the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. (This charge goes toward park upkeep.)

***Telephones*** The primary telecommunications network in Australia is Telstra (www.telstra.com).

**To call Australia:** If you're calling Australia from the United States:

1. Dial the international access code 011.
2. Dial the country code 61.
3. Dial the city code (drop the 0 from any area code given in this book) and then the number. So, if you're calling Sydney, the whole number you'd dial would be 011-61-2-0000-0000.

**To make international calls:** To make international calls from Australia, first dial 0011 and then the country code (U.S. or Canada 1, U.K. 44, Ireland 353, New Zealand 64). Next dial the area code and number. For example, if you wanted to call the British Embassy in Washington, D.C., you would dial 0011-1-202-588-7800. For other country codes, call ✆ **1222** or look in the back of the Australian White Pages.

**For directory assistance:** Dial ✆ **12455** if you're looking for a number inside Australia or ✆ **1225** for numbers to all other countries.

**For operator assistance:** If you need operator assistance in making a call, dial ✆ **1234.** To make a collect call, dial ✆ **12550.** To find a number, call Directory Assistance at ✆ **1223** for numbers in Australia and ✆ **1225** for international numbers.

**Toll-free numbers:** Numbers beginning with 1800 in Australia are toll-free, but calling a U.S. 1-800 (or 1-888, 1-877, or 1-866) number from Australia is not toll-free; it costs the same as an overseas call.

**Other numbers:** Numbers starting with 13 or 1300 in Australia are charged at the local fee of A25¢ (US20¢) per call anywhere in Australia. Numbers beginning with 1900 (or 1901 or 1902 and so on) are pay-for-service lines, and you will be charged as much as A$5 (US$4) a minute.

***Time Zones*** Eastern Standard Time (EST, sometimes also written as AEST) covers Queensland, New South Wales, the Australian Capital Territory, Victoria, and Tasmania. Central Standard Time (CST) is used in the Northern Territory and South Australia, and Western Standard Time (WST) is the standard in Western Australia. When it's noon in New South Wales, the ACT, Victoria, Queensland, and Tasmania, it's 11:30am in South Australia and the Northern Territory, and 10am in Western Australia. All states except Queensland, the Northern Territory, and Western Australia observe daylight saving time, usually from the last Sunday in October (the 1st Sun in Oct in Tasmania) to the last Sunday in March. However, not all states switch over to daylight saving on the same day or in the same week.

The east coast of Australia is GMT (Greenwich Mean Time) plus 10 hours. When it is noon on the east coast, it is 2am the same day in London, and 6pm in Los Angeles and 9pm in New York the previous night. These times are based on standard time, so allow for daylight saving in the Australian summer or in the country you are calling. New Zealand is 2 hours ahead of the east coast of Australia, except during daylight saving, when it is 3 hours ahead of Queensland.

***Tipping*** Tipping is not expected in Australia. It is usual to tip around 5% or round up to the nearest A$10 (US$8) for a substantial meal in a restaurant. Some passengers round up to the nearest dollar in a cab, but it's okay to insist on every bit of change back. Tipping bellboys and porters is sometimes done, but no one tips bar staff, barbers, or hairdressers.

***Useful Phone Numbers*** U.S. Dept. of State Travel Advisory: ✆ 202/647-5225 (manned 24 hr.)

U.S. Passport Agency: ✆ 202/647-0518

U.S. Centers for Disease Control International Traveler's Hotline: ✆ 404/332-4559

***Water*** Water is fine to drink everywhere. In the Outback, the taps may carry warm brackish water from underground, called "bore water," for showers and laundry, while drinking water is collected in rainwater tanks.

# 3

# Suggested Australia Itineraries

*by Marc Llewellyn & Lee Mylne*

Australia's size and its distance from Northern Hemisphere destinations are the two most daunting things about planning a visit. It's a long way to come for just a week, but if that's all you can spare, you still want to see as much as possible. While our inclination is to immerse ourselves in one spot, we're aware that not everyone wants to do that. Seeing as much as you can is often a priority.

Australia is a complex and fascinating place, merging ancient Aboriginal culture with modern life. You'll learn a lot in a week or two but will have just scraped the surface of this vast nation.

If you're a first-time visitor, with only 1 or 2 weeks, you may find these two itineraries most helpful: **Australia in 1 Week** or **Australia in 2 Weeks.** These itineraries can be shifted around to suit your needs; you could substitute the Cairns section of Australia in 1 Week for the Uluru/Red Centre suggestions in Australia in 2 Weeks, flying from Sydney to Uluru.

If you've been to Australia before or have already visited our major icons—Sydney, the Great Barrier Reef, or Uluru (Ayers Rock)—you might want to focus on another aspect of the country. You may even want to head out west to see the lesser-known, but very rewarding, parts of the country. If you're bringing your family with you, our Australia for Kids itinerary may give you some ideas to keep the young ones occupied (at the same time entertaining their parents).

You might also review chapter 1 to see what experiences or sights have special appeal to you and adjust the itineraries to suit your own interests.

Getting around this vast continent, where the major attractions are thousands of miles apart, is daunting and time-consuming. **Flying** is the only way to cover long distances efficiently, but unfortunately it can also be expensive. Remember to allow flying time in your itineraries and don't try to pack too much in on the days you fly—even domestic flights can be around 3 hours and can be draining. See "Getting Around Australia" in chapter 2 for information about air passes and getting the best rate on Australia's domestic carriers.

Our best advice is to take a tip from Australians: If the pace gets too hectic, just chill out and reorder your sightseeing priorities. Take time to meet the locals and ask their advice on what you should see as well.

## 1 Australia in 1 Week

Impossible! Australia is so vast that in 1 week, only a small corner of it—perhaps one city or a few of the natural wonders—will be all you get in such a short time. It will be memorable, nevertheless, and careful planning will maximize your time and allow you to see some of the major sights.

Use the following itinerary to make the most out of a week in Australia, but make sure you don't exhaust yourself trying to cram everything in. Australians are a laid-back lot, generally, and in some places the pace is relaxed. And that's just the way to enjoy it. One week provides barely enough time to see the best of Sydney, which for most people is the entry point to Australia. Your first view of the **Sydney Harbour Bridge** and the **Opera House** may well be from the air as your plane comes in. It's a spectacular introduction to a great city.

If you have only a week and want to head farther afield, there are two main choices, depending on your interests. The **Great Barrier Reef** is a "must" for scuba divers, but don't forget that you must allow time at either side of your reef trip before flying. There are no such problems with Australia's other icon, **Uluru (Ayers Rock),** in the heart of the **Red Centre.** This triangle, of course, is something of a cliché, but still gives you a complete Australian experience. Realistically, you will have to choose between the Reef and the Rock, or choose not to scuba dive while you are in Queensland.

## Days ❶ & ❷: Arrive in Sydney

Check into your hotel and spend whatever time you have after arrival recovering from almost-guaranteed jet lag. If you arrive in the morning and have a full day ahead of you, try to stay up and hit the nearest cafe for a shot of caffeine to keep you going. Head to **Circular Quay** and from there get a fantastic view of **Sydney Harbour Bridge** before strolling to the **Sydney Opera House** and soaking up some history at **The Rocks.** If you have time, you can take the ferry from Circular Quay to Manly beach to round off a fairly easy day with fish and chips, then head to bed for some much-needed sleep.

Start **Day 2** with a ride to the top of the **Sydney Tower** (formerly the A.M.P. Sydney Tower) for stunning 360-degree views of the city, stretching as far as the Blue Mountains. The 295m (984-ft.) tower has several attractions, including the Great Australian Exhibition Ride—a simulator ride the kids will love. For an introduction to Australia's wildlife, head to **Taronga Zoo** or the **Sydney Aquarium.** If you enjoy museums, put the **Australian Museum,** the **Australian National Maritime Museum** at Darling Harbour, and the interactive **Powerhouse Museum** on your list for the day. For an insight into Sydney's beginnings as a convict settlement, visit the **Hyde Park Barracks Museum**, a convict-built prison. Finish off your day with a twilight (or later at weekends) **BridgeClimb** or take the kids to **Luna Park,** a small and fairly traditional amusement park that's at its best at night.

## Day ❸: A Day Trip to the Blue Mountains

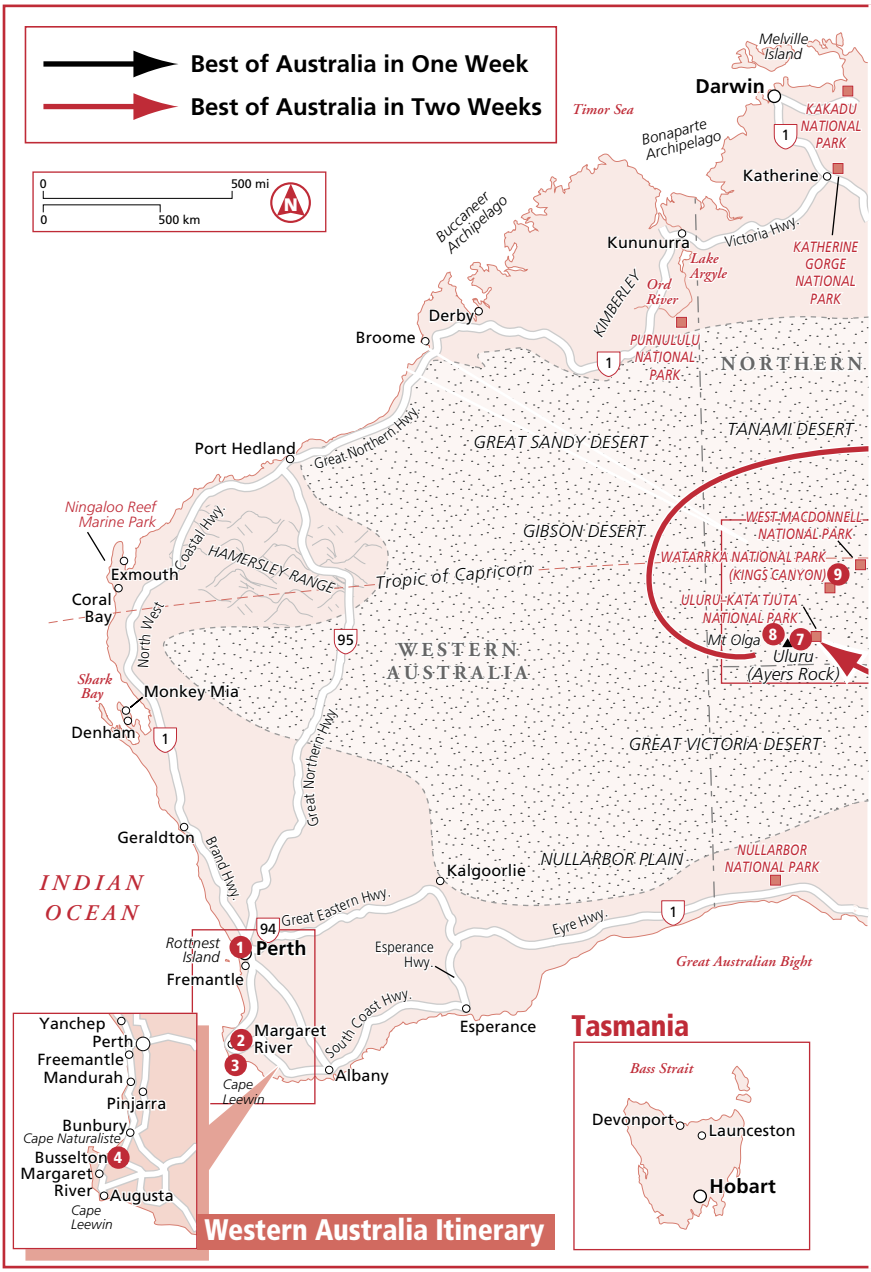
Take the train from Central Station to Katoomba for a day, exploring the beauty of the **Blue Mountains,** 2 hours from Sydney. Once there, jump on the Blue Mountains Explorer Bus, which allows you to hop on and off wherever you please. There are also many day-tour operators running to the Blue Mountains from Sydney. Whichever mode of transport you use, don't miss the spectacular Three Sisters rock formations, best viewed from Echo Point Road at Katoomba.

The adventurous might prefer to take a tour from Katoomba to the **Jenolan Caves,** about a 90-minute drive southwest. Nine caves are open for exploration, and you can take canyoning tours of between 3 hours and a full day. Head back to Sydney and have dinner somewhere with a view of the harbor.

## Day ❹: Cairns, Gateway to the Great Barrier Reef

On **Day 4,** take the earliest flight you can from Sydney to Cairns—flight time is 3 hours—and check into a hotel in the city,

# Suggested Australia Itineraries



Great Barrier Reef Area
Coral Sea
Daintree
Newell
DAINTREE NATIONAL PARK
Port Douglas
Yorkeys Knob
Cairns
Thursday Island
Arnhem Land
Gulf of Carpentaria
CAPE YORK PENINSULA
Coral Sea
Great Barrier Reef Marine Park
Cooktown
DAINTREE NATIONAL PARK
Port Douglas
Cairns
Mission Beach
Townsville
Whitsunday Islands National Park
SOUTH PACIFIC OCEAN
Proserpine
Mackay
Rockhampton
Gladstone
Bundaberg
Fraser Island
Sunshine Coast
Gold Coast
Brisbane
LAMINGTON NATL. PK.
Lightning Ridge
Coffs Harbour
Port Macquarie
Newcastle
Sydney
CANBERRA
A.C.T.
Tasman Sea
Tamworth
Oxley
Dubbo
BLUE MTNS. NATL. PK.
Broken Hill
Port Pirie
Mildura
Adelaide
Kangaroo Island
Wodonga
Albury
Mt. Kosciuszko
SNOWY MOUNTAINS
Mt. Gambier
Ballarat
Geelong
Melbourne
Apollo Bay
To Tasmania (see inset)
Tennant Creek
Mt. Isa
Barkly Hwy.
Stuart Hwy.
TERRITORY
MACDONNELL RANGES
Alice Springs
SIMPSON DESERT
Longreach
Landsborough Hwy.
Flinders Hwy.
Capricorn Hwy.
GREAT DIVIDING RANGE
Mitchell Hwy.
QUEENSLAND
SOUTH AUSTRALIA
Coober Pedy
FLINDERS RANGES NATIONAL PARK
Darling River
Barrier Hwy.
Murray River
Dukes Hwy.
Princes Hwy.
NEW SOUTH WALES
VICTORIA
Newell Hwy.
Hume Hwy.
Pacific Hwy.
England Hwy.
Bruce Hwy.

which on such a tight schedule will make getting to the major attractions quicker and easier than staying on the northern beaches, out of town. Explore the city a little and see some wildlife—including a massive saltwater crocodile—in the bizarre setting of the **Cairns Rainforest Dome,** atop the Hotel Sofitel **Reef Casino.** You will have time the rest of the day to head out to visit the **Tjapukai Aboriginal Cultural Park.** If you are not going to the Red Centre, this is a great place to learn about Aboriginal culture and life, albeit in a theme-park kind of way. You could spend several hours here or save the visit for the evening, when **Tjapukai by Night** tours give a different look at traditional ceremonies, including dinner and a fire-and-water outdoor show.

### Day ❺: A Day Trip to the Reef

Day trips to the Great Barrier Reef leave from the Reef Fleet Terminal. The trip to the outer reef takes about 2 hours, and once there you will spend your day on a pontoon with about 300 people. Experienced scuba divers may prefer to take a day trip with one of the dive charter companies who take smaller groups and visit two or three reefs. The pontoons of the big operators also offer the chance to take a scenic flight—a truly spectacular experience. Divers must spend another 24 hours in Cairns before flying. If you are content to snorkel, ride the glass-bottom boats, and soak up the sun, you will be able to fly the next day. After returning to Cairns, take a stroll along The Esplanade and eat at one of the busy cafes and restaurants that line the strip.

### Day ❻: Kuranda or the Daintree

Waiting out the day after scuba diving (you can't fly for 24 hr. after you've been on a dive) can be spent discovering another aspect to Australia—the rainforest. Take a trip to the mountain village of **Kuranda** aboard the steam train along the **Kuranda Scenic Railway,** past waterfalls and gorges. In Kuranda, explore the markets and the nature parks, and maybe take a **Kuranda Riverboat Tour,** which runs about 45 minutes. Make your return journey on the **Skyrail** cableway, which carries you over the rainforest (you can get to ground level at a couple of stations on the way) to the edge of Cairns. The views are sensational.

Another option is to head to the World Heritage–listed **Daintree Rainforest,** 2 hours' drive north of Cairns. Many tour operators, including Port Douglas–based Heritage & Interpretive Tours, run day tours into the Daintree and Cape Tribulation national parks. If you are exploring on your own, make time for a 1-hour cruise on the **Daintree River** with **Dan Irby's Mangrove Adventures,** where you will travel in a small open boat and see lots of fascinating wildlife. Both day and night tours are highly recommended.

If you choose the Daintree option, overnight in the lovely resort town of **Port Douglas** and head to one of its great restaurants—try **Nautilus** for fine dining or **Salsa Bar & Grill** for a more relaxed and lively atmosphere.

### Day ❼: Cairns to Sydney

Drive back to Cairns in the morning and head to the airport for your flight to Sydney. Unless you have a flight directly out of Cairns, you will spend most of your last day in Australia returning to Sydney. With the time you have left in Sydney, treat yourself to dinner at a restaurant overlooking the harbor, with its bridge and Opera House illuminated. It's a sight you'll carry home with you.

## 2 Australia in 2 Weeks

With 2 weeks, your visit to Australia will be much more relaxed and you will get a greater sense of the diversity of Australia, its landscape, and its people. You will get to

see all three icons—Sydney, the Great Barrier Reef, and Uluru—in more depth and maybe even have time to go outside those areas, especially if you limit your icons to two instead of three.

### Days ❶ to ❻: Australia in 1 Week

Follow itinerary outlined in tour above.

### Day ❼: Cairns to Uluru

On **Day 7,** leave Cairns as early as you can (this will probably mean spending the night in Cairns rather than Port Douglas). Your flight to Ayers Rock Airport will take around 3 hours, sometimes more, depending on the type of aircraft you are on. Make sure you book a direct flight, and not one that goes via Sydney! Try to get a window seat for the spectacular views as you fly over the Outback.

If you take the early flight, you can be in **Uluru** by around 9am, which gives you the whole day to take in the enormity of this fabulous monolith. Take the shuttle from Ayers Rock Resort (which is the only place to stay, but offers many accommodations choices) to the Rock. If you decide to **climb** Uluru (remembering that the Aboriginal traditional owners would prefer you didn't), make sure you don't do it at the hottest time of day. A climb will take you between 2 and 4 hours, depending on your fitness. An alternative is to join **Anangu Tours** for a walk around it; one of the best is the late-afternoon Kuniya walk, which concludes with watching sunset over Uluru—an unforgettable sight. Spend some time in the impressive and interesting **Uluru–Kata Tjuta Cultural Centre** near the base of Uluru. And after doing all that in a day, you'll be ready for a quiet dinner at whatever hotel you've chosen.

### Day ❽: Exploring Uluru

Sunrise is one of the magic times at Uluru, so make the effort to get up early on Day 8. This is also a great time to do the 9.6km (6-mile) Base Walk circumnavigating Uluru, which takes 2 to 3 hours. There are a range of other ways to experience Uluru, including camel rides, Harley-Davidson tours, and helicopter joy-flights, but walking up close to the Rock beats them all, in our opinion.

You will also have time today to head to **Kata Tjuta** (also called the Olgas), where you will see there is much more to the Red Centre than just one Rock. Kata Tjuta is about 48km (30 miles) west of Uluru, but plenty of tours go there if you do not have your own wheels.

End your day in the desert with the Sounds of Silence dinner, run by Ayers Rock Resort. Sip champagne as the sun sets over Uluru, to the eerie music of the didgeridoo, and then tuck into kangaroo, barramundi, and other native foods. But it's not the food you're here for—it's the silence and the stars. A short stargazing session with an astronomer ends a memorable evening.

### Day ❾: Uluru to Kings Canyon

Hire a 4WD and tackle the long Outback drive from Uluru to Alice Springs, stopping for a night at **Kings Canyon.** It is 306km (190 miles) from Uluru to Kings Canyon (also known as **Watarrka National Park**), which offers another unbeatable look at Outback Australia. You can spend the afternoon walking up the side of the canyon and around the rim. It is very steep and will take you around 4 hours. A gentler walk is the short and shady canyon floor walk. Stay overnight at Kings Canyon Resort.

### Day ❿: Kings Canyon to Alice Springs

Get an early start for Alice Springs and take the unpaved but interesting Mereenie Loop Road, which will take you through the Glen Helen Gorge or the historic Hermannsburg mission settlement. Whichever road you take, the scenery is

like nowhere else in Australia. You will probably spend most of the day driving to Alice, making a few stops along the way.

On arrival check into a hotel and head out to one of the local restaurants, several of which offer sophisticated versions of "bush tucker" including kangaroo, emu, and crocodile dishes.

### Day ⓫: Alice Springs

If you can stand another early start, take a **dawn balloon flight** over the desert, usually followed by a champagne breakfast. If you don't head back to bed immediately for a few hours catch-up sleep, there are plenty of attractions to discover, including the **Alice Springs Desert Park** for a look at some unusual Australian creatures, the **School of the Air,** and the **Royal Flying Doctor Service** base. In the afternoon, take a half-day tour with an Aboriginal guide at the **Aboriginal Art & Culture Centre.** Alternatively, visit the **Alice Springs Telegraph Station historical reserve** set in an oasis just outside town for a look at early settler life. Finish the day with a **sunset camel ride** down the dry Todd River bed and have dinner at the camel farm.

### Day ⓬: Alice Springs to Sydney

Direct flights from Alice Springs to Sydney leave in the early afternoon, so you have all morning to explore more of the town and perhaps buy some Aboriginal art (this is one of the best places to get it).

On arrival in Sydney after an almost 3-hour flight, book into your hotel and spend the night discovering some of the city's nightlife.

### Day ⓭: A Day at Bondi Beach

For sands of a different kind to those you've experienced in recent days, take the bus to Sydney's most famous beach, **Bondi,** and spend it lazing on the sand or—in summer, at least—taking a dip in the surf. Take the Bondi Explorer bus from Circular Quay, which gives you a choice of harbor-side bays and coastal beaches, or take the train to Bondi Junction and then a bus to the beach. The scenic cliff-top walk to **Bronte Beach** is worth doing, or you can continue farther to **Coogee.**

### Day ⓮: Sydney

Your final day in Australia can be spent on last-minute shopping and seeing those Sydney sights that you haven't had time for so far. Cap it all off with a slap-up seafood dinner somewhere with a fantastic view of the Harbour Bridge.

## 3 Australia for Families

Australia is an unbelievable destination for kids—and not just for the kangaroos and koalas that almost every child (and parent!) is desperate to see. Our suggestion is to explore Sydney for 2 days with family in tow, then head up to the beautiful Blue Mountains on a day trip to ride the cable car and the world's steepest railway. The climax comes with a few days exploring the Barrier Reef and the rainforest around Port Douglas.

### Days ❶ & ❷: Sydney

First off, head to Circular Quay to see the **Sydney Opera House.** A tour inside might be a bit much for younger kids, but you can walk around a fair bit of it and take the obligatory photos of Australia's most famous landmark. To stretch your legs, head from here into the **Royal Botanic Gardens** to spot long-beaked ibises wandering around the grass and hundreds of fruit bats squabbling among the treetops in the jungle section in the middle of the gardens.

Walk back past the Opera House and the ferries to The Rocks, where you can take a quick stroll through the historic streets, stopping off for a look at **The Puppet Shop at the Rocks,** where you can get up close to a (puppet) kangaroo or emu with strings attached.

There are plenty of places to eat lunch, but a filling prospect is pasta—ravioli or the likes—at **Rossini,** opposite the ferry terminals, where you can sit outside and watch the world go by. Portions are large, so you might want to split a meal between younger kids.

After lunch take a ferry to **Taronga Zoo,** where a cable car takes you up the hill to the main entrance. All the kids' favorites are here, from kangaroos and koalas to platypuses, located in a nocturnal house. A farmyard section edges onto a playground of sorts with lots of water features to give your kids a sprinkle on a hot day.

On **Day 2** head to the city center for an elevator ride up to the top of **Sydney Tower,** where you can look right across Sydney as far as the Blue Mountains in the distance. Entry includes admission to Skytour, which features a darkened storytelling room where the kids can learn a little about Australian legends and Aborigines, and there's also a thrilling simulator ride that takes you on adventures throughout Australia.

It's a short walk from here to Darling Harbour, where you can cap off the morning with a visit to **Sydney Aquarium.** The sharks are huge here, and they swim right above your head, but the real attraction is the amazing Barrier Reef section, where tens of thousands of colorful fish swim by in huge tanks to the sound of classical music.

Eat lunch at one of the many cheap eateries on the other side of the bridge before either taking the monorail back to Town Hall or taking another ferry from near the Aquarium back to Circular Quay.

If it's a hot day, or you just want to go to the beach, you have two main choices: From Circular Quay you can take a half-hour ferry ride or a 15-minute high-speed JetCat to **Manly.** Here you can laze the afternoon away and even rent a surfboard, body board, or in-line skates. Or take a CityRail train from Town Hall to **Bondi,** then a bus to Bondi Beach, where you can reward your efforts with ice cream or a late-afternoon pizza from Pompei's, on the main drag.

### Day ❸: The Blue Mountains

You could easily spend a couple more days with the kids having fun in Sydney, but you shouldn't miss a trip to the mountains. Several companies run tour buses to the area, stopping off at an animal park along the way. The best one to visit is **Featherdale,** where you can get up close to more kangaroos, koalas, and Tasmanian devils. The tour will also stop at **Scenic World,** where you can take the short ride on the **Scenic Railway.** It's very steep, so hold on tight. At the bottom you'll find yourselves among an ancient tree fern forest—it's truly remarkable. A short walk takes you to the **Skyway,** a cable car that travels 300m (984 ft.) above the Jamison Valley.

Elsewhere in the mountains there are fabulous views across craggy bluffs and deep bowls of gum trees. It's a long day, so pack plenty of snacks and a few favorite toys.

### Days ❹, ❺ & ❻: The Reef and the Rainforest

Now it's time to head north, up the tropics. You'll need to fly, of course, otherwise it would take you several days to drive up the coast. Most people base themselves in Port Douglas rather than Cairns because the beach is huge and uncrowded and some of the best trips originate from here.

After the flight, relax on the beach, but remember to swim inside the nets off the sand; the "stingers" (box jellyfish) around

here can cause life-threatening stings, especially where kids are concerned.

The next day, it's time to visit the reef. Thankfully, once on the reef itself, the dangerous jellyfish are very uncommon. Cruise boats take around 90 minutes to get from Port Douglas to the outer reef, but once there you are in for some amazing snorkeling. Expect to see numerous species of corals and fish, and even an occasional turtle. A good seafood lunch is generally served onboard so you won't go hungry!

On Day 6 it's time for a real jungle experience. Tours leave Port Douglas daily for the **Daintree** and **Cape Tribulation** national parks. Usually included in the tour is a boat trip among the local crocodiles, a stroll along an isolated beach, and, of course, walks in the rainforest, where you emerge into a dripping world of palms, strangler figs, staghorns, pythons, frogs, and electric-blue butterflies.

### Day ❼: Back to Sydney

On Day 7 fly back to Sydney. If you have time, take the kids by ferry to **Luna Park,** just across from Circular Quay, or walk there across the Harbour Bridge. The fun park is small, with a few rides suitable for younger kids, but it does boast a magnificent view across to the Harbour Bridge and Opera House, which look glorious after the sun's gone down.

## 4 A Few Days in Margaret River, WA

Getting to see more of Australia than its most famous icons and the east-coast beaches is not always easy. But if you have the time, there are many wonderful places to discover off the beaten track, which will give another dimension to your image and memories of Australia. Here, we suggest a few days in the Margaret River region, just a few hours' drive south of the Western Australia capital, Perth. You can add it on to the end of a week or so in the east, or change it with the latter part of the 1- or 2-week itineraries above.

Note that each year from August to mid-November, the southern half of Western Australia is blessed with a carpet of 12,000 species of white, yellow, mauve, pink, red, and blue **wildflowers.** Wildflower shows and festivals in country towns throughout the state accompany the annual blossoming. September and October are the peak months.

Starting from the pleasant, sunny city of Perth, you can tailor your trek for wildlife watching, winery tours, and the chance to see unique small villages.

Fly to Perth from any of the other destinations above; for specific information on getting there from the other capitals or overseas (if you choose to start in the west and head east), see chapter 10, "Perth & Western Australia."

### Day ❶: Welcome to Perth

The capital of Western Australia, **Perth,** has great food, a fabulous outdoor life of biking and beaches, plenty of smallish museums well worth a look, and a beautiful historic port, Fremantle. If you'd like to spend a day or so getting over your jet lag as well as getting to know the city, you can overnight here before taking off on your exploration of WA. A relaxing way to spend the day is at the port of **Fremantle,** about 19km (12 miles) south of Perth's downtown at the mouth of the Swan River.

"Freo" is a bustling district of 150 National Trust buildings, alfresco cafes, museums, galleries, pubs, markets, and shops in a masterfully preserved historical atmosphere. It's still a working port, so you will see fishing boats unloading and yachts gliding in and out of the harbor. Perth's population makes a beeline for the place every weekend, resulting in a wonderful hubbub of buzzing shoppers, merchants,

java drinkers, yachties, tourists, and fishermen. You can enjoy the parade as you knock back a beer or two on the veranda of a gorgeous old pub.

### Day ❷: Perth to Margaret River

A leisurely 4-hour drive southwest from Perth will put you on the edge of the vineyards of Margaret River, a compact region that is easy to find your way around. En route, stop off at the town of Bunbury, where you may be lucky enough to see the **wild dolphins** that regularly come in to "play" with visitors. Make the township of Margaret River your base for a few days' touring that will take you to your choice of around 40 wineries, as well as art galleries and many other gourmet produce outlets. Have dinner at one of the gourmet restaurants in Margaret River's main street—perhaps try the local seafood specialty, marron (a crustacean), with a bottle of Margaret River wine.

### Day ❸: South to Cape Leeuwin

Spend the day traveling the winding country roads of the southwest "hook" of Western Australia. Caves Road runs from Margaret River south to Augusta and the historic lighthouse at **Cape Leeuwin.** Augusta is also one of the best places in the south to see migrating whales in season and there are many tours available. Your trip will take you through stands of massive karri and jarrah trees. Don't miss **Boranup Drive,** a scenic detour that will take you to the coast for a view of the Indian Ocean. For the adventurous, there is a maze of caves, some of which are open to the public. Have lunch at one of the winery restaurants or picnic in their lovely gardens. Wind your way back to Margaret River, with the car stocked with some new wines to try, as well as local cheeses, olive oil, and more. Remember to designate a driver before setting out if you are planning to wine taste; Australia's drunk-driving laws are strictly enforced and carry heavy penalties.

### Day ❹: North to Cape Naturaliste and Perth

Caves Road runs north from Margaret River heading for Cape Naturaliste. Northwest of the town of Cowaramup you will find clusters of wineries including some of Australia's big names, as well as the **Margaret River Chocolate Company.** Take your time through the tree-lined country roads and take time to explore some of the local galleries and enjoy the wildlife. At Yallingup, you will swing northeast for Dunsborough, where—September through December—you can board a boat operated by **Naturaliste Charters** to see humpbacks and other whales.

# 4

# Sydney

*by Marc Llewellyn*

Sunny, sexy, and sophisticated, Sydney (pop. 4.1 million) basks in its worldwide recognition as the shining star of the Southern Hemisphere. The "Emerald City" is one of the most attractive on earth. Some people compare it with San Francisco—it certainly has that relaxed feel—but the gateway to Australia is very much its own unique city.

First, there's the Sydney Opera House, one of the most recognized buildings in the world. This white-sailed construction on Sydney Cove, designed by Danish architect Jørn Utzon, is the pride of the city—but there's far more on offer.

For example, you can walk across that other great icon, the Sydney Harbour Bridge, on the pathway beside the trains and traffic and catch the CityRail train back into town. Those with a daredevil spirit can join a BridgeClimb tour across catwalks and ladders to the top of the main arch for 360-degree views of the Opera House and the boats below.

Sydney is one of the biggest cities in the world—but fortunately most of the interesting things are concentrated in a relatively compact area around one of the finest urban harbors in the world.

There's so much to do in Sydney that you could easily spend a week here and still find yourself crashing into bed at night exhausted by trying to see all the main attractions.

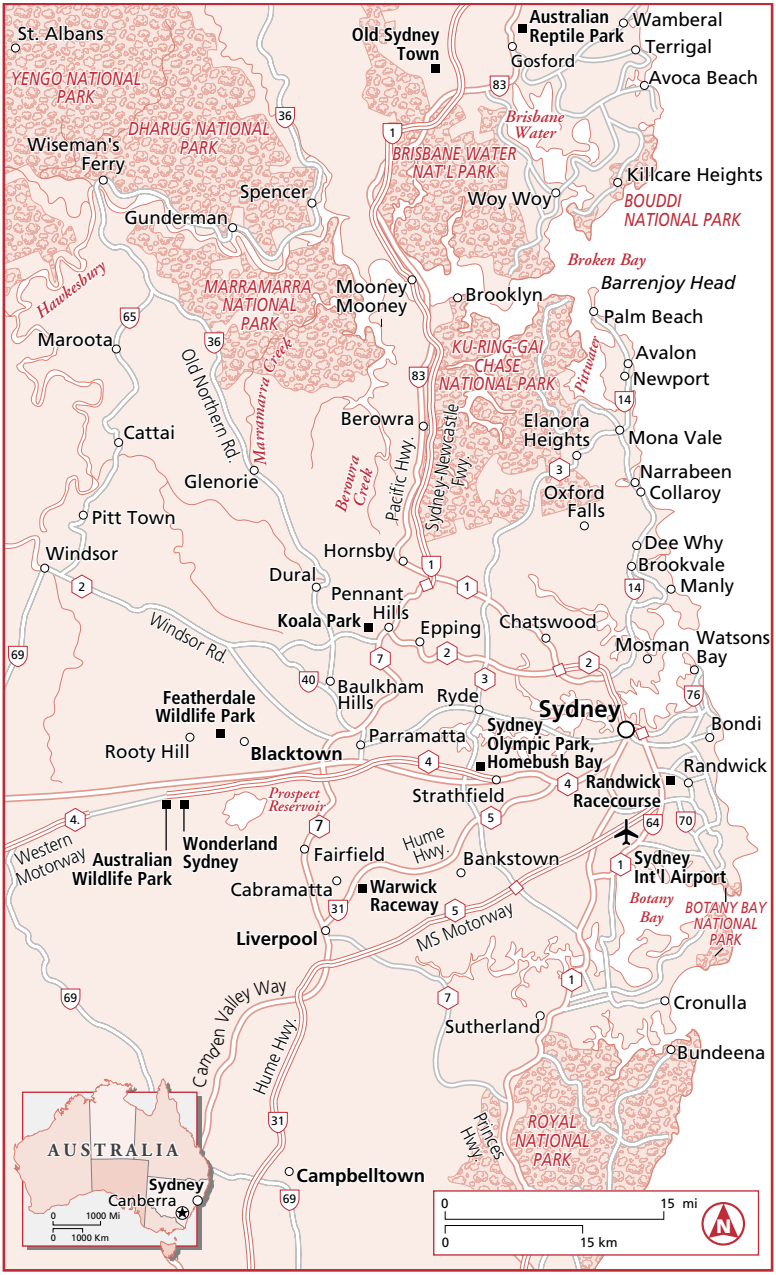
Sydney's greatest summer experience is on the beaches—and with over 20 strung along the city's oceanfront and dozens more around the harbor, you'll be spoiled for choice. The most famous is Bondi, a strip of golden sand legendary for its Speedo-clad lifesavers and surfboard riders. From here a "must do" is the 3.2km (2-mile) coastal path that leads off across the cliff tops, via cozy Tamarama Beach (dubbed Glamourama for its chic sun worshippers), to glorious Bronte Beach, where you can cool down in the crashing waves of the Pacific.

Another beach favorite is Manly, a 30-minute ferry trip from Circular Quay. Pick up some fish and chips and head for the main beach, flanked by a row of giant pines that chatter with hundreds of colorful lorikeets at dusk.

The best time to return is in the early evening, when the lights of the skyscrapers around Circular Quay streak like rainbows across the water of the harbor, and the sails of the Opera House and the girders of the Harbour Bridge are lit up—it's magical.

History is enshrined in its many museums and art galleries, while modern Sydney comes alive in the more recent developments around Darling Harbour and the restaurant and entertainment area nearby at Cockle Bay and Kings Wharf. At Darling Harbour you'll find the world-class Sydney Aquarium. You can also start your gourmet tour of Sydney's Modern Australian cooking style, which encompasses the best of freshness with spices from Asia and flavors from the Mediterranean.

# Greater Sydney



Add to this side trips to the gorges and cliffs of the Blue Mountains, the wineries of the Hunter Valley, and the whale-watching around Port Stephens (see "Port Stephens: Dolphin- & Whale-Watching" in chapter 5), and you'll see why Sydney gets so much praise.

The frugal traveler will find that, compared with other major international cities, Sydney offers good value. Food and public transport are cheap, and attractions are generally not prohibitively expensive. (Senior and student prices are almost always available if you have identification.) The price of a hotel room is far cheaper than in other major population centers such as New York and London.

## 1 Orientation

### ARRIVING

**BY PLANE** **Sydney International Airport** is 8km (5 miles) from the city center. Free shuttle buses link the international and domestic terminals. In both terminals, you'll find luggage carts, wheelchairs, a post office (open Mon–Fri 9am–5pm), mailboxes, currency exchange, duty-free shops (including one before you go through Customs on arrival, selling alcohol and perfume), restaurants, bars, stores, showers, luggage lockers, a Baggage Held Service for larger items, ATMs, and tourist information desks. You can rent mobile phones in the International Terminal. There is also a Sydney Visitors Centre bookings desk (✆ **02/9667 6050**) offering cheap deals on hotels (see "Where to Stay," later in this chapter), as well as car rental, phone cards, and maps and brochures. Here you can also buy the SydneyPass (see section 2, "Getting Around"). The airport is efficient, has extremely strict quarantine procedures—you must declare all food—and is completely nonsmoking. On arrival, pick up a copy of *Sydney: The Official Guide,* from the rack just before passport control, which contains tear-out discount tickets for some of Sydney's major attractions. Luggage trolleys are free in the international arrival terminal but cost A$3 (US$2.40) outside the departure terminal (you'll need coins). ***Tip:*** Duty-free alcohol and perfumes are available on arrival in Sydney from an international flight. You can take two bottles of standard alcohol through customs without declaring them.

**GETTING INTO TOWN** The **Sydney Airport Train Link** connects the international and domestic airports to the city stations of Central, Museum, St. James, Circular Quay, Wynyard, and Town Hall. You'll need to change trains for other Sydney stations. Unfortunately, the line has no dedicated luggage areas and because it's on a scheduled route into the city from the suburbs, it gets very crowded during rush hours (approximately 7–9am and 4–6:30pm). If you have lots of luggage and you're traveling into the city at these times, it's probably best to take an airport bus (see below) or

**Tips Tourist Refund Scheme**

Visitors to Australia are entitled to claim any Goods and Services Tax (GST) on purchases over A$300 (US$240) per store. The GST component is 10% of the sale price. Do this at the refund booth located past Customs. After doing the paperwork—you need to have the goods and receipt with you, not in your checked luggage—you will receive your refund by check on the spot. You can convert this to cash at any foreign exchange booth at Sydney Airport.

### Tips Taxi Savvy

Especially in busy periods, taxi queues can be long, and drivers may try to cash in by insisting you share a cab with other passengers at the airport. Here's the scam: After dropping off the other passengers, the cab driver will try to charge you the full price of the journey, despite the fact that the other passengers paid for their sections. You certainly won't save any money sharing a cab if this happens, and your journey will be a long one. I find it's often better to wait until you can get your own cab, or catch an airport bus to the city center (and then take a taxi to your hotel, if necessary). If you are first in line in the taxi rank, the law states that you can refuse to share the cab.

a taxi. Otherwise walk to the end of the platform, and there should be more room onboard. There are elevators at the Airport Train Link stations and some at the city train stations (but the crowds and lack of staff and signs mean you'll probably end up lugging it all up loads of steps anyway). The train takes 10 minutes to reach the Central Railway Station and continues to Circular Quay. Trains leave every 15 minutes or so and cost A$11 (US$8.80) one-way for adults and A$7.30 (US$5.85) for children. Adults can take advantage of the **City Hopper ticket** which means you can travel to the city from the airport and use CityRail trains all day within the city center (bounded by North Sydney, Kings Cross, and Redfern stations). Tickets cost A$18 (US$14) for travel in peak time and A$16 (US$13) for off-peak travel.

Another option is a **Group Ticket,** which allows up to three adults to travel into the city together for A$27 (US$22). You can buy this ticket only at the airport. Finally, a **Family Fare** ticket allows a second child (or third, fourth, or more, if you are so burdened) to travel for free with an adult. The first child pays the standard child fare.

The **Kingsford Smith Airport Coach** operates to the city center from bus stops outside the terminals. This service will drop you off (and pick you up) at your hotel (pickups require at least 1-hr. advance notice; call ✆ **02/9667 3221**). Tickets cost A$7 (US$5.60) one-way and A$11 (US$8.80) round-trip. The return portion can be used at any time in the future.

A **taxi** from the airport to the city center costs about A$27 (US$22). In 2005 a A$2 (US$1.60) surcharge was added to taxi fares from the airport. An expressway, the Eastern Distributor, is the fastest way to reach the city from the airport. There's a A$3.50 (US$2.80) toll from the airport to the city (the taxi driver pays the toll and adds the cost to your fare), but there is no toll to the airport. A 10% credit card charge applies.

**BY TRAIN** **Central Station** (✆ **13 15 00** for CityRail and 13 22 32 for Countrylink interstate trains) is the main city and interstate train station. It's at the top of George Street in downtown Sydney. All interstate trains depart from here, and it's a major CityRail hub. Many city buses leave from neighboring Railway Square for places like Town Hall and Circular Quay.

**BY BUS** **Greyhound** coaches operate from the **Sydney Coach Terminal** (✆ **02/9281 9366**), on the corner of Eddy Avenue and Pitt Street, bordering Central Station.

**BY CRUISE SHIP** Cruise ships dock at the **Overseas Passenger Terminal** in The Rocks, opposite the Sydney Opera House, and in Darling Harbour.

**BY CAR** Drivers enter Sydney from the north on the Pacific Highway, from the south on the M5 and Princes highways, and from the west on the Great Western Highway.

## VISITOR INFORMATION

The **Sydney Visitor Centre,** 106 George St., The Rocks (✆ **1800/067 676** in Australia, or 02/9255 1788; www.sydneyvisitorcentre.com), is a good place to pick up maps, brochures, YHA cards, and general tourist information abut Sydney as well as towns in New South Wales; it also has two floors of displays on The Rocks. The office is open daily from 9am to 6pm. There's another visitor center in Darling Harbour (33 Wheat St.). It's open from 10am to 6pm daily.

Also in The Rocks is the **National Parks & Wildlife Centre,** in Cadmans Cottage, 110 George St. (✆ **02/9247 5033**). This place has lots of national park information and runs boat tours to some of the islands in Sydney Harbour. Elsewhere, there's a **City Host information kiosk,** located at Martin Place (between Elizabeth and Castlereagh sts.). It's open daily from 9am to 5pm. There's also a Visitor Centre at the International Terminal. If you want to inquire about destinations and holidays in Sydney or the rest of New South Wales, call **Tourism New South Wales**'s help line (✆ **13 20 77** in Australia).

Electronic information on cinema, theater, exhibitions, and other events is available through **Talking Guides** (✆ **13 16 20** in Australia). You'll need a code number for each topic, which you can find on p. 3 of the A-K section of the *Sydney Yellow Pages.* The service costs the same as a local call.

A good website is **CitySearch Sydney** (www.sydney.citysearch.com.au), for events, entertainment, dining, and shopping.

## CITY LAYOUT

Sydney is one of the largest cities in the world by area, covering more than 1,730 sq. km (675 sq. miles) from the sea to the foothills of the Blue Mountains. Thankfully, the city center is compact. The jewel in Sydney's crown is its harbor, which empties into the South Pacific Ocean through headlands known simply as North Head and South Head. On the southern side of the harbor are the high-rises of the city center; the Sydney Opera House; a string of beaches, including Bondi; and the inner-city suburbs. The Sydney Harbour Bridge and a tunnel connect the city center to the high-rises of the North Sydney business district and the affluent suburbs and beautiful beaches beyond.

**MAIN ARTERIES & STREETS** The city's main thoroughfare, **George Street,** runs up from **Circular Quay** (pronounced "key"), past the Wynyard CityRail station and Town Hall, to Central Station. A whole host of streets run parallel to George Street, including Pitt, Elizabeth, and Macquarie streets. **Macquarie Street** runs up from the Sydney Opera House, past the Royal Botanic Gardens and Hyde Park. **Martin Place** is a pedestrian thoroughfare that stretches from Macquarie to George streets. It's about halfway between Circular Quay and Town Hall—in the heart of the city center. The easy-to-spot Sydney Tower (also known as Centrepoint Tower), facing onto pedestrian-only **Pitt Street Mall** on Pitt Street, is the main city-center landmark. Next to Circular Quay and across from the Opera House is **The Rocks,** a cluster of small streets that was once a slum and is now a tourist attraction. Roads meet at Town Hall from Kings Cross in one direction and Darling Harbour in the other. From Circular Quay to The Rocks it's a 5- to 10-minute stroll, to Wynyard about 10 minutes,

and to Town Hall about 20 minutes. From Town Hall to the near side of Darling Harbour it's about a 10-minute walk.

## THE NEIGHBORHOODS IN BRIEF

### South of the Harbour

**Circular Quay** This transport hub for ferries, buses, and CityRail trains is tucked between the Harbour Bridge and the Sydney Opera House. The Quay is a good spot for a stroll, and its outdoor restaurants and street performers are popular. The Rocks, the Royal Botanic Gardens, the Contemporary Art Museum, and the start of the main shopping area (centered on Pitt and George sts.) are a short walk away. To reach the area, take a CityRail train, ferry, or city-bound bus to Circular Quay.

**The Rocks** This small historic area, a short stroll west of Circular Quay, is packed with colonial stone buildings, intriguing back streets, boutiques, pubs, tourist stores, and top-notch restaurants and hotels. It's the most exclusive place to stay in the city because of its beauty and proximity to the Opera House and harbor. Shops are geared toward Sydney's yuppies and wealthy Asian tourists—don't expect bargains. On weekends a portion of George Street is blocked off for The Rocks Market, with stalls selling souvenirs and crafts. To reach the area, take any bus for Circular Quay or The Rocks (on George St.) or a CityRail train or ferry to Circular Quay.

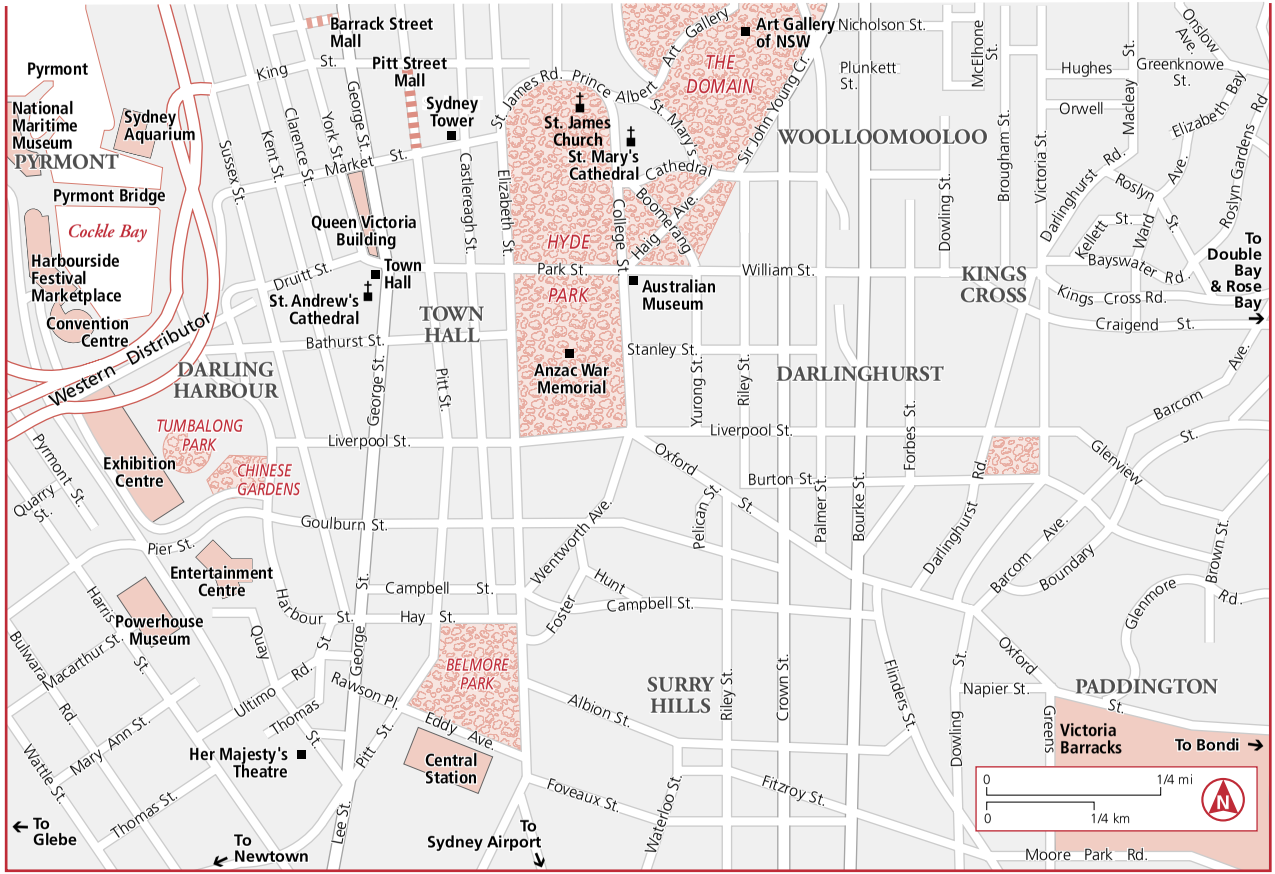
**Town Hall** In the heart of the city, this area is home to the main department stores and two Sydney landmarks, the Town Hall and a historic shopping mall called the Queen Victoria Building (QVB). In this area are Sydney Tower and the boutique-style chain stores of Pitt Street Mall. Farther up George Street are major movie houses, the entrance to Sydney's Spanish district (around Liverpool St.), and the city's Chinatown. To reach the area, take any bus from Circular Quay on George Street, or a CityRail train to the Town Hall stop.

**Darling Harbour** Designed as a tourist precinct, Darling Harbour features Sydney's main convention, exhibition, and entertainment centers; a waterfront promenade; the Sydney Aquarium; the Panasonic IMAX Theatre; the Australian Maritime Museum; the Powerhouse Museum; Star City, Sydney's casino; a major food court; and plenty of shops. Nearby are the funky restaurants of Cockle Bay and Kings Wharf. To reach Darling Harbour, take a ferry from Circular Quay (Wharf 5), the monorail from Town Hall, or the light rail (tram) from Central Station.

**Kings Cross & the Suburbs Beyond** "The Cross," as it's known, is the city's red-light district—though it's also home to some of Sydney's best-known nightclubs and restaurants. The area has plenty of backpacker hostels, a few bars, and some upscale hotels. The main drag, Darlinghurst Road, is short but crammed with strip joints, prostitutes, addicts, and drunks. Also here are cheap e-mail centers that offer discount overseas phone rates. Fortunately, there's a heavy police presence, but do take care. Beyond the strip clubs and glitter, the suburbs of Elizabeth Bay, Double Bay, and Rose Bay hug the waterfront. To reach the area, take a CityRail train to Kings Cross. From the next stop, Edgecliff, it's a short walk to Double Bay and a longer one to Rose Bay.

**Paddington/Oxford Street** This inner-city suburb, centered on trendy Oxford Street, is known for expensive terrace

# Sydney at a Glance


Pyrmont
National Maritime Museum
Sydney Aquarium
PYRMONT
Pyrmont Bridge
Cockle Bay
Harbourside Festival Marketplace
Convention Centre
Western Distributor
DARLING HARBOUR
TUMBALONG PARK
Exhibition Centre
CHINESE GARDENS
Entertainment Centre
Powerhouse Museum
Barrack Street Mall
Pitt Street Mall
Sydney Tower
Queen Victoria Building
Town Hall
St. Andrew's Cathedral
TOWN HALL
Sussex St.
Kent St.
Clarence St.
York St.
George St.
King St.
Market St.
Castlereagh St.
Elizabeth St.
Druitt St.
Bathurst St.
Liverpool St.
Goulburn St.
Pier St.
Quarry St.
Pyrmont St.
Harris St.
Bulwara Rd.
Macarthur St.
Harbour St.
Quay St.
Ultimo Rd.
Thomas St.
Mary Ann St.
Wattle St.
Thomas St.
George St.
Rawson Pl.
Pitt St.
Lee St.
Campbell St.
Hay St.
Her Majesty's Theatre
Central Station
Eddy Ave.
BELMORE PARK
SURRY HILLS
Albion St.
Foveaux St.
Waterloo St.
Fitzroy St.
Crown St.
Riley St.
Flinders St.
Dowling St.
Napier St.
PADDINGTON
Victoria Barracks
To Bondi
St. James Church
St. Mary's Cathedral
St. James Rd.
Prince Albert St.
Art Gallery Rd.
Art Gallery of NSW
THE DOMAIN
Sir John Young Cr.
St. Mary's Cathedral
HYDE PARK
College St.
Boomerang Ave.
Halo Ave.
Park St.
William St.
Australian Museum
Anzac War Memorial
Stanley St.
Yurong St.
Riley St.
Pitt St.
Elizabeth St.
Castlereagh St.
Wentworth Ave.
Pelican St.
Oxford St.
Burton St.
Palmer St.
Bourke St.
Forbes St.
Liverpool St.
DARLINGHURST
WOOLLOOMOOLOO
Nicholson St.
Plunkett St.
McElhone St.
Brougham St.
Victoria St.
Dowling St.
Hughes St.
Greenknowe St.
Orwell St.
Macleay St.
Onslow Ave.
Elizabeth Bay Rd.
Roslyn Gardens
Darlinghurst Rd.
Roslyn Ave.
Kellett St.
Ward St.
Bayswater Rd.
KINGS CROSS
Kings Cross Rd.
Craigend St.
To Double Bay & Rose Bay
Barcom Ave.
Glenview St.
Darlinghurst Rd.
Barcom Ave.
Boundary St.
Brown St.
Glenmore Rd.
Oxford St.
Moore Park Rd.
0 1/4 mi
0 1/4 km
N
To Glebe
To Newtown
To Sydney Airport

houses, off-the-wall boutiques and bookshops, and restaurants, pubs, and nightclubs. It's also the heart of Sydney's large gay community and has a liberal scattering of gay bars and dance spots. To reach the area, take bus no. 380 or 382 from Circular Quay (on Elizabeth St.); no. 378 from Railway Square, Central Station; or no. 380 or 382 from Bondi Junction. The lower end of Oxford Street is a short walk from Museum CityRail Station (take the Liverpool St. exit).

**Darlinghurst** Between grungy Kings Cross and upscale Oxford Street, this extroverted, grimy terraced suburb is home to some of Sydney's best cafes. It's probably not wise to wander around at night. Take the CityRail train to Kings Cross and head right from the exit.

**Central** The congested, polluted crossroads around Central Station, the city's main train station, has little to recommend it. Buses run from here to Circular Quay, and it's a 20-minute walk to Town Hall. The Sydney Central YHA (youth hostel) is here.

**Newtown** This popular student area centers on car-clogged King Street, which is lined with alternative shops, bookstores, and ethnic restaurants. People-watching is the thing to do—see how many belly-button rings, violently colored hairdos, and Celtic arm tattoos you can spot. To reach the area, take a CityRail train to Newtown Station.

**Glebe** Young professionals and students come to this inner-city suburb for the cafes, restaurants, pubs, and shops along the main thoroughfare, Glebe Point Road. All this, plus a location 15 minutes from the city and 30 minutes from Circular Quay, makes it a good place for budget-conscious travelers. To reach Glebe, take bus no. 431, 433, or 434 from Millers Point, The Rocks (on George St.), or bus no. 459 behind Town Hall.

**Bondi & the Southern Beaches** Some of Sydney's most glamorous surf beaches—Bondi, Bronte, and Coogee—lie along the South Pacific coast southeast of the city center. Bondi has a wide sweep of beach (crowded in summer), some interesting restaurants and bars, plenty of attitude and beautiful bodies—and no CityRail station. To reach Bondi, ride bus no. 380 or 382 to Bondi Beach from Circular Quay—it takes up to an hour—or (a quicker alternative) a CityRail train to Bondi Junction to connect with the same buses. Bus no. 378 from Railway Square, Central Station, goes to Bronte, and bus no. 373 or 374 travels to Coogee from Circular Quay.

**Watsons Bay** Watsons Bay is known for The Gap—a section of dramatic sea cliffs—as well as several good restaurants, such as Doyles on the Beach, and the Watsons Bay Hotel beer garden, also run by Doyles. It's a terrific spot to spend a sunny afternoon. To reach it, take bus no. 324 or 325 from Circular Quay. There's limited ferry service daily from Circular Quay (Wharf 2), starting at 10:15am on weekdays, 9:15am on weekends and holidays.

## North of the Harbour

**North Sydney** Across the Harbour Bridge, the high-rises of North Sydney attest to its prominence as a business area. There's little for tourists here, except the possibility of being knocked over on a busy thoroughfare. Chatswood (take a CityRail train from Central or Wynyard station) has some good suburban-type shopping, and Milsons Point has a decent pub, the Kirribilli Hotel, as well as Luna Park, an amusement park that recently

reopened despite complaints from wealthy locals who say it was too noisy—you can see the giant smiling clown face from Circular Quay.

**The North Shore** Ferries and buses provide access to these wealthy neighborhoods across the Harbour Bridge. Gorgeous Balmoral Beach, Taronga Zoo, and upscale boutiques are the attractions in Mosman. Take a ferry from Circular Quay (Wharf 2) to Taronga Zoo—10 minutes—and a bus to Balmoral Beach (another 10 min.).

**Manly & the Northern Beaches** Half an hour away by ferry, or 15 minutes by the faster JetCat, Manly is famous for its ocean beach—it gives Bondi a run for its money—and scores of cheap food outlets. Farther north are more beaches popular with surfers. CityRail train lines do not go to the northern beaches. The farthest one from the city, Palm Beach, has magnificent surf and lagoon shorelines, walking paths, and a golf course. To reach the area, take the ferry or JetCat from Circular Quay (wharves 2 and 3) to Manly. Change at Manly interchange (transfer point) for various buses to the northern beaches, nos. 148 and 154 through 159. You can also take bus no. L90 from Wynyard station.

### West of the City Center

**Balmain** West of the city center, a short ferry ride from Circular Quay, Balmain was once Sydney's main shipbuilding area. In the last few decades, the area has become trendy and expensive. The suburb has a village feel to it, abounds with restaurants and pubs, and stages a popular Saturday market at the local church. Take bus no. 441, 442, or 432 from Town Hall or George Street, or a ferry from Circular Quay (Wharf 5), and then a short bus ride up the hill to the main shopping area.

**Homebush Bay** Sydney Olympic Park was the main site of the 2000 Olympic Games. You'll find Stadium Australia, the Aquatic Center, and Homebush Bay Information Centre, parklands, and a water-bird reserve. To reach the area, take a CityRail train from Circular Quay to the Olympic Park station.

## 2 Getting Around

### BY PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

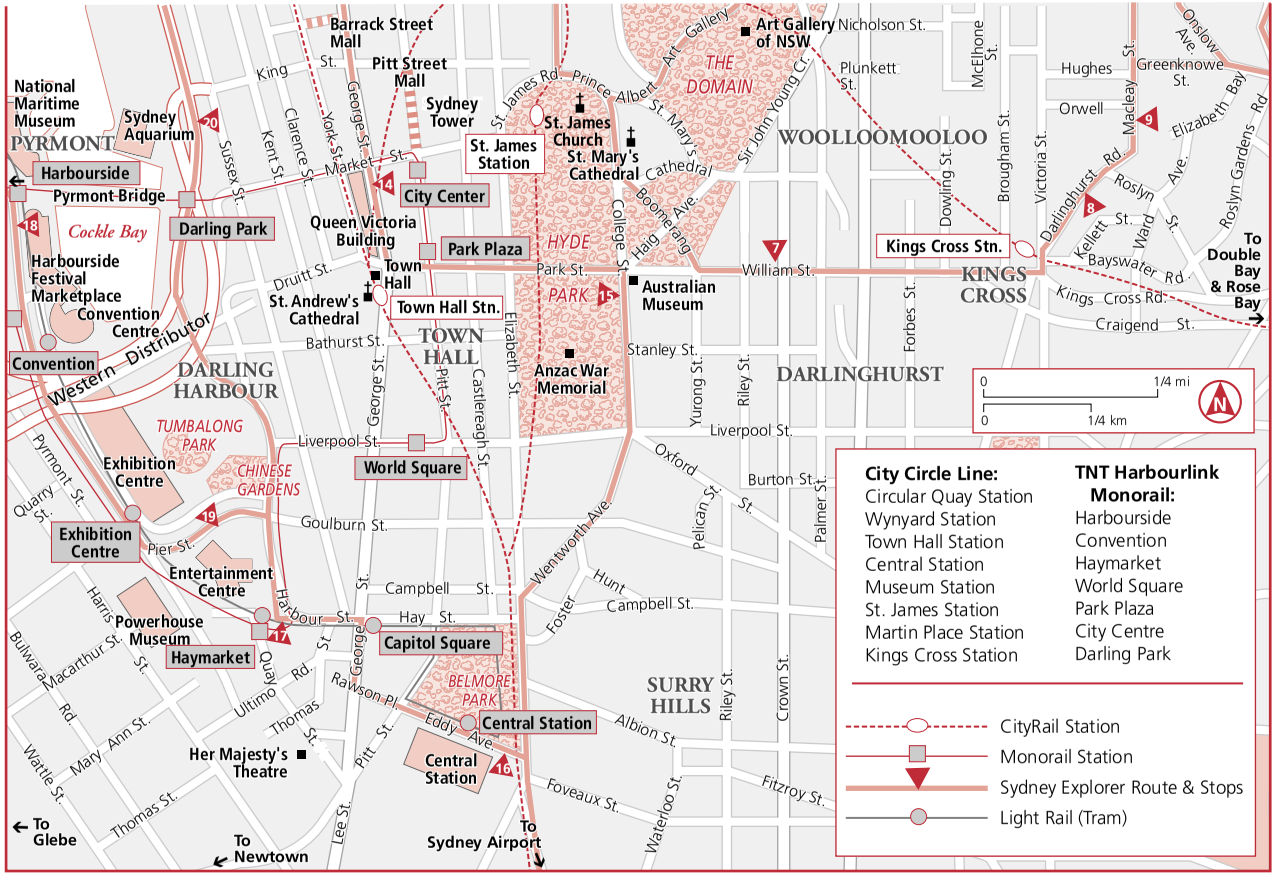
State Transit operates the city's buses and the ferry network, CityRail runs the urban and suburban trains, and Sydney Ferries runs the public passenger ferries. Some private bus lines operate buses in the outer suburbs. In addition, a monorail connects the city center to Darling Harbour, and a light rail (tram) line runs between Central Station and Wentworth Park in Pyrmont.

**MONEY-SAVING TRANSIT PASSES** Several passes are available for visitors who will be using public transportation frequently. All work out to be much cheaper than buying individual tickets.

**Tips Transit Information**

For bus, ferry, and train timetable information, call **Infoline** (✆ **13 15 00** in Australia) daily from 6am to 10pm. Otherwise check the website for Sydney buses and ferries (www.sydneybuses.nsw.gov.au) or CityRail (www.cityrail.info). Pick up a **Sydney Transport Map** (a guide to train, bus, and ferry services) at any rail, bus, or ferry office.

# Sydney Transportation Systems


National Maritime Museum
PYRMONT
Sydney Aquarium
Harbourside
Pyrmont Bridge
Cockle Bay
Darling Park
Harbourside Festival Marketplace
Convention Centre
Convention
Western Distributor
DARLING HARBOUR
TUMBALONG PARK
Exhibition Centre
CHINESE GARDENS
Exhibition Centre
Entertainment Centre
Powerhouse Museum
Haymarket
Barrack Street Mall
Pitt Street Mall
Sydney Tower
St. James Station
City Center
Queen Victoria Building
Park Plaza
Town Hall
St. Andrew's Cathedral
Town Hall Stn.
TOWN HALL
World Square
Capitol Square
Central Station
Central Station
Her Majesty's Theatre
St. James Church
St. Mary's Cathedral
HYDE PARK
Australian Museum
Anzac War Memorial
THE DOMAIN
Art Gallery of NSW
WOOLLOOMOOLOO
Kings Cross Stn.
KINGS CROSS
DARLINGHURST
SURRY HILLS
BELMORE PARK
To Glebe
To Newtown
To Sydney Airport
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N
City Circle Line:
Circular Quay Station
Wynyard Station
Town Hall Station
Central Station
Museum Station
St. James Station
Martin Place Station
Kings Cross Station
TNT Harbourlink Monorail:
Harbourside
Convention
Haymarket
World Square
Park Plaza
City Centre
Darling Park
CityRail Station
Monorail Station
Sydney Explorer Route & Stops
Light Rail (Tram)

The **SydneyPass** includes unlimited travel on Sydney Explorer coaches, Bondi & Bay Explorer coaches, three Sydney Harbour cruises, the JetCat to Manly, the high-speed RiverCat to Parramatta (linking the city center to this important heritage and business center along a historic waterway), Sydney buses, Sydney Ferries, and CityRail trains (within the "Red TravelPass" travel zone, which includes the entire city center, as well as to Bondi Junction). The SydneyPass costs A$100 (US$80) for adults and A$50 (US$40) for children for 3 days of travel over a 7-day period; A$130 (US$104) for adults and A$65 (US$52) for children for 5 days over a 7-day period; and A$150 (US$120) for adults and A$75 (US$60) for children for 7 consecutive days. Family fares are also available. Buy tickets at the information desk at the airport, at the TransitShop at Circular Quay (outside McDonald's), from the Sydney Ferries ticket offices at Circular Quay, and from Explorer bus drivers.

A **Weekly Travel Pass** allows unlimited travel on buses, trains, and ferries. There are six different passes (each a different color) depending on the distance you need to travel. The passes visitors most commonly use are the Red Pass and the Green Pass. The Red Pass costs A$32 (US$26) for adults and A$16 (US$13) for kids and covers all transportation within the city center and near surroundings. This pass will get you aboard inner harbor ferries, for example, but not the ferry to Manly. The Green Pass, which costs A$40 (US$32) for adults and A$20 (US$16) for kids, will take you to more distant destinations, including Manly (aboard the ferry but not the JetCat before 7pm). You can buy either pass at newsdealers, or bus, train, and ferry ticket outlets.

The **Day Tripper** ticket gives you unlimited bus, train, and ferry travel for 1 day. Tickets cost A$15 (US$12) for adults and A$7.50 (US$6) for children. The pass is available at all bus, train, and ferry ticket outlets.

A **CityHopper** ticket allows unlimited all-day travel on CityRail trains bounded by Kings Cross, North Sydney, and Redfern. Peak-time tickets cost A$6.80 (US$5.45) for adults and A$3.40 (US$2.70) for children, and off-peak tickets cost A$4.80 (US$3.85) for adults and A$2.40 (US$1.90) for children. If you're coming from farther out, you can still ask for a CityHopper. It will cost an extra A$2 (US$1.60) for adults and A$1 (US80¢) for children on top of your return rail ticket.

A **Travelten ticket** offers 10 bus rides for a discounted price. A Blue Travelten covers two sections on the bus route and costs A$13 (US$10) for adults and A$6.30 (US$5.05) for children; a Brown Travelten covers up to nine sections and costs A$21 (US$17) for adults and A$11 (US$8.80) for children. The **Travelten ferry ticket** costs A$30 (US$24) for adults and A$15 (US$12) for kids and is good for 10 trips within the inner harbor (this excludes Manly). The Manly ferry Travelten costs A$45 (US$36) for adults and A$23 (US$18) for children, and the JetCat Travelten to Manly (before 7pm) costs A$66 (US$53) for adults (free for children). Buy Travelten tickets at newsdealers, bus depots, or the Circular Quay ferry terminal. Tickets are transferable, so if two or more people travel together, you can use the same ticket.

**BY PUBLIC BUS** Buses are frequent and reliable and cover a wide area of metropolitan Sydney—though you might find the system a little difficult to navigate if you're visiting some of the outer suburbs. The minimum fare (which covers most short hops in the city) is A$1.60 (US$1.30) for adults and A80¢ (US65¢) for children for a 4km (2½-mile) section. The farther you go, the cheaper each section is. For example, the 44km (27-mile) trip to Palm Beach, way past Manly, costs A$5.20 (US$4.15) for adults and A$2.60 (US$2.10) for kids. Sections are marked on bus-stand signs, but

most Sydneysiders are as confused about the system as you will be—when in doubt, ask the bus driver.

Most buses bound for the northern suburbs, including night buses to Manly and the bus to Taronga Zoo, leave from Wynyard Park on Carrington Street, behind the Wynyard CityRail station on George Street. Buses to the southern beaches, such as Bondi and Bronte, and the western and eastern suburbs leave from Circular Quay. Buses to Balmain leave from behind the QVB.

Call the **Transport Info Line** (✆ **13 15 00**) for information, or ask the staff at the bus information kiosk on the corner of Alfred and Loftus streets, behind Circular Quay CityRail station (✆ **02/9219 1680**). The kiosk is open Monday through Saturday from 8am to 8pm and Sunday from 8am to 6pm. Buses run from 4am to around midnight during the week, less frequently on weekends and holidays. Some night buses to outer suburbs run after midnight and throughout the night. You can purchase single tickets onboard; exact change is not required.

**BY SYDNEY EXPLORER BUS** These red buses operate every day, traveling a 28km (18-mile) circuit and stopping at 26 places of interest. These include the Sydney Opera House, the Royal Botanic Gardens, the State Library, Mrs. Macquarie's Chair, the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Kings Cross, Elizabeth Bay House, the Wynyard CityRail station, the QVB, A.M.P. Centrepoint Tower, the Australian Museum, Central Station, Chinatown, Darling Harbour, and The Rocks. Buses depart from Circular Quay at 18-minute intervals starting at 8:40am, with the last bus departing Circular Quay at 5:20pm (and returning to Circular Quay at 7pm). Board anywhere along the route where you see the distinctive red Sydney Explorer sign and leave at any attraction along the way. If you want to stay on the bus from start to finish, the full circuit takes 1½ hours. Your Sydney Explorer ticket entitles you to free travel on regular "blue and white" Sydney Buses within the same zone covered by your Sydney Explorer Ticket until midnight. When planning your itinerary for the day, remember that some attractions, such as museums, close at 5pm. Tickets cost A$36 (US$29) for adults, A$18 (US$14) for children 4 to 16, and A$90 (US$72) for families. Buy tickets onboard the bus. You can also buy a 2-day Twin Ticket for both the Sydney Explorer Bus and the Bondi Explorer Bus (see below). This ticket costs A$62 (US$50) for adults, A$31 (US$25) for children, and A$155 (US$124) for families.

**BY BONDI EXPLORER BUS** The Bondi Explorer operates every day, traveling a 30km (19-mile) circuit around the eastern harborside bays and coastal beaches. Stops along the way include Kings Cross, Double Bay, Watsons Bay, Bondi Beach, Bronte Beach, Coogee Beach, Paddington, Oxford Street, and Martin Place. The bus departs from Circular Quay at 25-minute intervals starting at 9:15am, with the last bus departing Circular Quay at 4:20pm (and returning to Circular Quay at 5:55pm). Board anywhere along the route where you see the Bondi & Bay Explorer sign and get off at any attraction along the way. If you wish to stay on board from start to finish without making any stops, the entire circuit takes 1½ hours. Your ticket entitles you to free travel on regular "blue and white" Sydney Buses within the same zone covered by your Bondi & Bay Explorer ticket until midnight. The 1-day fare is A$36 (US$29) for adults, A$18 (US$14) for children 4 to 16, and A$90 (US$72) for families. Buy the ticket onboard.

**BY FERRY & JETCAT** The best way to get a taste of a city that revolves around its harbor is to jump aboard a ferry. The main ferry terminal is at Circular Quay. Machines at each wharf dispense tickets. (There are also change machines.) For ferry

information, call ✆ **13 15 00** or visit the ferry information office opposite Wharf 4. Timetables are available for all routes.

One-way journeys within the inner harbor (virtually everywhere except Manly and Parramatta) cost A$4.80 (US$3.85) for adults and A$2.40 (US$1.90) for children. The ferry to Manly takes 30 minutes and costs A$6 (US$4.80) for adults and A$3 (US$2.40) for children. It leaves from Wharf 3. The rapid JetCat service to Manly takes 15 minutes and costs A$7.50 (US$6) for both adults and children. After 7pm all trips to and from Manly are by JetCat at ferry prices. Ferries run from 6am to midnight.

**BY CITYRAIL** Sydney's publicly owned train system is a good news/bad news way to get around. The good news is that it can be a cheap and efficient way to see the city, the bad news is that the system is limited; many tourist areas—including Manly, Bondi Beach, and Darling Harbour—are not connected to the network. In the last couple of years, it's become even more problematic. While trains tend to run regularly, the idea of some sort of timetable went out of the window in 2004 and 2005 when safety issues relating to a crash forced the state government to institute strict medical tests on its train drivers. The result, compounded with decades of underinvestment, meant drastic cuts to services—particularly on weekends. CityRail timetables should be viewed as basic guides only. One-way tickets within the city center cost A$3 (US$2.40) for adults and A$1.50 (US$1.20) for children. Round-trip tickets cost A$6 (US$4.80) for adults and A$3 (US$2.40) for children in peak time, and A$3.60 (US$2.90) for adults and A$2.40 (US$1.90) for children in off-peak hours.

Prices regularly increase. Information is available from **Infoline** (✆ **13 15 00** in Australia).

**BY COUNTRYLINK** Comfortable and efficient **Countrylink** trains out of Central Station link the city with the far suburbs and beyond. For reservations, call ✆ **13 22 32** in Australia between 6:30am and 10pm, or visit the **Countrylink Travel Center** (✆ **02/9224 2742;** www.countrylink.info), Station Concourse, at the Wynyard CityRail station, for brochures and bookings.

**BY METRO MONORAIL** The metro monorail, with its single overhead line, is seen by many as a blight and by others as a futuristic addition to the city. The monorail connects the central business district to Darling Harbour—though it's only a 15-minute walk from Town Hall. The system operates Monday through Thursday from 7am to 10pm, Friday and Saturday from 7am to midnight, and Sunday from 8am to 10pm. Tickets are A$4 (US$3.20) per person, free for children under 5. An all-day monorail pass costs A$8 (US$6.40) for adults and A$22 (US$18) for families; it may be worth buying—it comes with vouchers offering 25% off entrance fees to some local attractions. The trip from the city center to Darling Harbour takes around 12 minutes. Look for the gray overhead line and the plastic tubelike structures that are the stations. Call **Metro Monorail** (✆ **02/8584 5288;** www.metrolightrail.com.au) for more information.

**BY METRO LIGHT RAIL** A system of trams runs on a route that traverses a 3.6km (2¼-mile) track between Central Station and Wentworth Park in Pyrmont. It provides access to Chinatown, Paddy's Markets, Darling Harbour, the Star City casino, and the Sydney Fish Markets. The trams run every 10 minutes. The one-way fare is A$2.90 to A$3.90 (US$2.30–US$3.10) for adults and A$1.40 to A$3.80 (US$1.10–US$3.05) for children 4 to 15, depending on distance. A day pass costs A$8.40 (US$6.70) for adults, A$6.30 (US$5.05) for children, and A$20 (US$16) for

families of five. Contact **Metro Light Rail** (✆ **02/8584 5288;** www.metrolightrail.com.au) for details.

## BY TAXI

Taxis are a relatively economical way to get around. Several companies serve the city center and suburbs. All journeys are metered. If you cross either way on the Harbour Bridge or through the Harbour Tunnel, it will cost you an extra A$3 (US$2.40)—a rip-off considering there's only an official toll on the way into the city. If you take the Eastern Distributor from the airport, it's A$3.50 (US$2.80). An extra 10% will be added to your fare if you pay by credit card.

Taxis line up at stands in the city, such as those opposite Circular Quay and Central Station. They are also frequently found in front of hotels. A yellow light on top of the cab means it's vacant. Cabs can be hard to get on Friday and Saturday nights and between 2 and 3pm every day, when cabbies are changing shifts after 12 hours on the road. Tipping is not necessary, but it's appreciated—a dollar or so is plenty. Some people prefer to sit up front, but it's certainly not considered rude if you don't. Passengers must wear seat belts in the front and back seats. The **Taxi Complaints Hotline** (✆ **1800/648 478**) deals with problem taxi drivers. Taxis are licensed to carry four people.

The main cab companies are **Taxis Combined Services** (✆ 02/9332 8888); **RSL Taxis** (✆ 02/9581 1111); **Legion Cabs** (✆ 13 14 51); and **Premier** (✆ 13 10 17).

## BY WATER TAXI

Harbour Taxis, as they are called, operate 24 hours a day and are a quick, convenient way to get to waterfront restaurants, attractions, and some suburbs. They can also be chartered for private cruises. A trip from Circular Quay to Watsons Bay, for example, costs about A$145 (US$116) for the boat (it holds 10, so the more people the cheaper it is). The main operator is **Water Taxis Combined** (✆ **1300/666 484**).

## BY CAR

Traffic restrictions, parking, and congestion can make getting around by car frustrating, but if you plan to visit some of the outer suburbs or take excursions elsewhere in New South Wales, then renting a car will give you more flexibility. The National Roads and Motorists' Association (NRMA) is the New South Wales auto club; for emergency breakdown service, call ✆ **13 11 11.**

Car-rental agencies in Sydney include **Avis,** 214 William St., Kings Cross (✆ 1800/225 553); **Budget,** 93 William St., Kings Cross (✆ **13 27 27** in Australia, or 02/9339 8888); **Hertz,** corner of William and Riley streets, Kings Cross (✆ **13 30 39** in Australia); and **Thrifty,** 75 William St., Kings Cross (✆ **02/9380 5399**). Avis, Budget, Hertz, and Thrifty also have desks at the airport. Rates average about A$60 (US$48) per day for a small car. One of the best value operations is **Bayswater Car Rentals,** 180 William St., Kings Cross (✆ **02/9360 3622**), which has small cars for A$48 (US$38) a day, or A$25 (US$20) a day for 6 days or more.

You can rent a motor home (called a camper van by some Aussies) from **Britz Campervans,** 653 Gardeners Rd., Mascot, NSW 2020 (✆ **1800/331 454** in Australia, or 02/9667 0402; www.britz.com). Plan to pay about A$105 (US$84) a day for a two-person van in winter and around A$145 (US$116) in summer. You can drop off your van at most state capitals and in Cairns, a convenience that costs an extra A$200 (US$160).

## *FAST FACTS:* Sydney

***American Express*** The main Amex office is at Level 3, 130 Pitt St., near Martin Place (✆ **02/9236 4200**). It cashes traveler's checks and acts as a travel booking service. It's open Monday through Friday from 8:30am to 5pm and Saturday from 9am to noon. Another foreign exchange office is on the walkway leading up to the Sydney Opera House (✆ **02/9251 1970**). If you've lost your traveler's checks, go to the head office, 175 Liverpool St. (✆ **02/9271 1111**). It's a locked security building, so you'll need to call ahead.

***Babysitters*** **Dial an Angel** (✆ **02/9416 7511** or 02/9362 4225) is a well-regarded babysitting service.

***Business Hours*** General office and banking hours are Monday through Friday from 9am to 5pm. Many banks, especially in the city center, are open from around 9:30am to 12:30pm on Saturday. Shopping hours are usually from 8:30am to 5:30pm daily (9am–5pm Sat), and most stores stay open until 9pm on Thursday. Most city-center stores are open from around 10am to 4pm on Sunday.

***Currency Exchange*** Most major bank branches offer currency exchange services. Small foreign-currency exchange offices are clustered at the airport and around Circular Quay and Kings Cross. **Thomas Cook** has offices at the airport; at 175 Pitt St. (✆ **02/9231 2877**), open Monday through Friday from 6:45am to 5:15pm and Saturday from 10am to 2pm; and on the lower ground floor of the QVB (✆ **02/9264 1133**), open Monday through Saturday from 9am to 6pm (Open later Fri, until 9pm) and Sunday from 11am to 5pm.

***Dentist*** A well-respected office in the city is **City Dental Practice,** Level 2, 229 Macquarie St., near Martin Place (✆ **02/9221 3300**). For dental problems after hours, call **Dental Emergency Information** (✆ **02/9369 7050**).

***Doctor*** The **Park Medical Centre,** Shop 4, 27 Park St. (✆ **02/ 9264 4488**), in the city center near Town Hall, is open Monday through Friday from 8am to 6pm; consultations cost A$40 (US$32) for 15 minutes. (***Note:*** If you plan to take a dive course in Australia, get your medical exam done here. It costs A$70/US$56, about the cheapest in Australia.) The **Kings Cross Travelers' Clinic,** Suite 1, 13 Springfield Ave., Kings Cross, just off Darlinghurst Road (✆ **1300/369 359** in Australia, or 02/9358 3066), is great for travel medicines and emergency contraception pills, among other things. Hotel visits in the Kings Cross area cost A$80 (US$64); consultations cost A$40 (US$32). The **Travelers' Medical & Vaccination Centre,** Level 7, 428 George St., in the city center (✆ **02/9221 7133**), stocks and administers travel-related vaccinations and medications.

***Embassies & Consulates*** All foreign embassies are based in Canberra. You'll find the following consulates in Sydney: **Canada,** Level 5, 111 Harrington St., The Rocks (✆ **02/9364 3000**); **New Zealand,** 55 Hunter St. (✆ **02/9223 0144**); **United Kingdom,** Level 16, Gateway Building, 1 Macquarie Place, Circular Quay (✆ **02/9247 7521**); and **United States,** Level 59, MLC Centre, 19–29 Martin Place (✆ **02/9373 9200**).

***Emergencies*** Dial ✆ **000** to call police, the fire service, or an ambulance. Call the **Emergency Prescription Service** (✆ **02/9235 0333**) for emergency drug

prescriptions and the National Roads and Motorists' Association (NRMA) for car breakdowns (✆ **13 11 11**).

***Eyeglass Repair*** **Perfect Vision,** Shop C22A, in the A.M.P. Centrepoint Tower, 100 Market St. (✆ **02/9221 1010**), is open Monday through Friday from 9am to 6pm (until 9pm Thurs) and Saturday from 9am to 5pm. It's the best place to replace lost contact lenses; bring your prescription.

***Holidays*** See "When to Go" in chapter 2. New South Wales also observes Labor Day on the first Monday in October.

***Hospitals*** Try **Sydney Hospital,** Macquarie Street, at the top end of Martin Place (✆ **02/9382 7111** for emergencies). **St. Vincents Hospital** is at Victoria and Burton streets in Darlinghurst, near Kings Cross (✆ **02/9339 1111**).

***Hot Lines*** Call the **Poisons Information Center** (✆ 13 11 26), the **Gay and Lesbian Counseling Line** (✆ 02/9207 2800; 4pm–midnight), the **Rape Crisis Center** (✆ 02/9819 6565), or the **Crisis Center** (✆ 02/9358 6577).

***Internet Access*** Several Internet and e-mail centers are scattered around Kings Cross, Bondi, and Manly.

***Lost Property*** There is no general lost property bureau in Sydney. Contact the nearest police station if you think you've lost something. For items lost on trains, contact the **Lost Property Office,** 494 Pitt St., near Central Railway Station (✆ **02/9379 3000**). The office is open Monday through Friday from 8:30am to 4:30pm. For items left behind on planes or at the airport, go to the Federal Airport Corporation's administration office on the top floor of the International Terminal at Sydney International Airport (✆ **02/9667 9583**). For stuff left behind on buses or ferries, call ✆ **02/9245 5777.** Each taxi company has its own lost-property office.

***Luggage Storage*** You can leave your bags at the International Terminal at the airport. A locker costs A$5 (US$4) per day; the storage room charges around A$9 (US$7.20) per day per piece. The room is open from 4:30am to the last flight of the day. Call ✆ **02/9667 0926** for information. Otherwise, leave luggage at the cloakroom at Central Station, near the front of the main building (✆ **02/9219 4395**). Storage at the rail station costs A$5 (US$4) per article per day. The **Travelers Contact Point,** 7th floor, 428 George St., above the Dymocks bookstore (✆ **02/9221 8744**), stores luggage for A$15 (US$12) per piece per month. It also operates a poste restante service; has Internet access, a travel agency, and a jobs board; and ships items to the U.K. and Ireland.

***Newspapers*** The *Sydney Morning Herald* is considered one of the world's best newspapers—by its management, at least—and is available throughout metropolitan Sydney. The equally prestigious *Australian* is available nationwide. The metropolitan *Daily Telegraph* is a more casual read and publishes a couple of editions a day. The *International Herald Tribune, USA Today,* the British *Guardian Weekly,* and other U.K. newspapers can be found at Circular Quay newspaper stands and most newsdealers.

***Pharmacies (Chemist Shops)*** Most suburbs have pharmacies that are open late. For after-hours referral, contact the **Emergency Prescription Service** (✆ **02/9235 0333**).

***Police*** In an emergency, dial ✆ **000.** Make nonemergency police inquiries through the Sydney Police Centre (✆ **02/9281 0000**).

***Post Office*** The General Post Office (GPO) is at 130 Pitt St., not far from Martin Place (✆ **13 13 18** in Australia). It's open Monday through Friday from 8:30am to 5:30pm and Saturday from 10am to 2pm. General-delivery letters can be sent c/o Poste Restante, G.P.O., Sydney, NSW 2000, Australia (✆ **02/9244 3733**) and collected at 310 George St., on the third floor of the Hunter Connection shopping center. It's open Monday through Friday from 8:15am to 5:30pm. For directions to the nearest post office, call ✆ **1800/043 300.**

***Restrooms*** These can be found in the QVB (second floor), at most department stores, at Central Station and Circular Quay, near the escalators by the Sydney Aquarium, and in the Harbourside Festival Marketplace in Darling Harbour.

***Safety*** Sydney is an extremely safe city, but as anywhere else, it's good to keep your wits about you and your wallet hidden. If you wear a money belt, keep it under your shirt. Be wary in Kings Cross and Redfern at all hours and around Central Station and the cinema strip on George Street near Town Hall station in the evening—the latter is a hangout for local gangs, though they're usually busy holding each other up for their sneakers. Other places of concern are the back lanes of Darlinghurst, around the naval base at Woolloomooloo, and along the Bondi restaurant strip when the drunks spill out after midnight. Several people have reported thieves at the airport. If traveling by train at night, travel in the carriages next to the guard's van, marked with a blue light on the outside.

***Taxes*** Australia imposes a 10% Goods and Services Tax (GST) on most goods sold in Australia and most services. The GST applies to most travel-related goods and services, including transport, hotels, tours, and restaurants. By law, the tax has to be included in the advertised price of the product, though it doesn't have to be displayed independently of the pretax price. See the box "Tourist Refund Scheme," p. 100.

***Telephones*** Sydney's public phone boxes take coins, and many also accept credit cards and A$10 (US$8) phone cards available from newsdealers. Local calls cost A40¢ (US30¢).

***Transit Information*** Call the **Infoline** (✆ **13 15 00**) daily from 6am to 10pm.

***Useful Telephone Numbers*** For news, dial ✆ **1199;** for the time, ✆ **1194;** for Sydney entertainment, ✆ **11 688;** for directory assistance, ✆ **12 455;** for Travelers Aid Society, ✆ **02/9211 2469.**

***Weather*** For the local forecast, call ✆ **1196.**

## 3 Where to Stay

There are hundreds of places to stay in Sydney for the frugal traveler, from great hotels to top-rate backpackers places. Although you're unlikely to find the city's hotels completely booked if you turn up looking for a bed for the night, it's probably wise to reserve rooms in advance. A good idea is to check the Internet to find which of the hotels listed below are promoting special deals around the time you want to stay. At any time, though, booking over the Net can be cheaper than paying at the front door.

### Tips Last-Minute Room Deals

If you turn up in town without a reservation, you should use the Sydney Visitors Centre bookings desk (✆ **02/9667 6050**) in the arrivals hall of the airport's International Terminal. It negotiates deals with many of Sydney's hotels (but not hostels) and offers exceptional discounts on rooms that haven't been filled that day. You can save up to 50% on a room. The desk is open from 6am to the last flight of the day. It also offers discounts on tours (to the Blue Mountains, for example) and cheap tickets for flights within Australia.

Most rooms are also cheaper when bought as part of a package. Most of the larger hotels do special deals on weekends—when their corporate clients are at home with the family—so don't be afraid to check them out to see if a deal suits your budget.

Serviced apartments are worth considering—they mean big savings on meals because you can cook your own food. Many also offer free laundry services.

Another option is a YHA youth hostel. Most hostels in Australia have basic double or family rooms that work out significantly cheaper than hotels. All ages stay here, too. Check out the YHA Australia website at www.yha.com.au.

Another way to hunt for discounted hotel rooms is through an independent hotel search site. The two most popular are **www.lastminute.com.au** and **www.wotif.com**. Lastminute.com allows you to check prices of various room categories at least a month in advance. Wotif.com allows you to search for a room up to 14 days in the future. Hotels also provide both sites with special deals for rooms for the next couple of days.

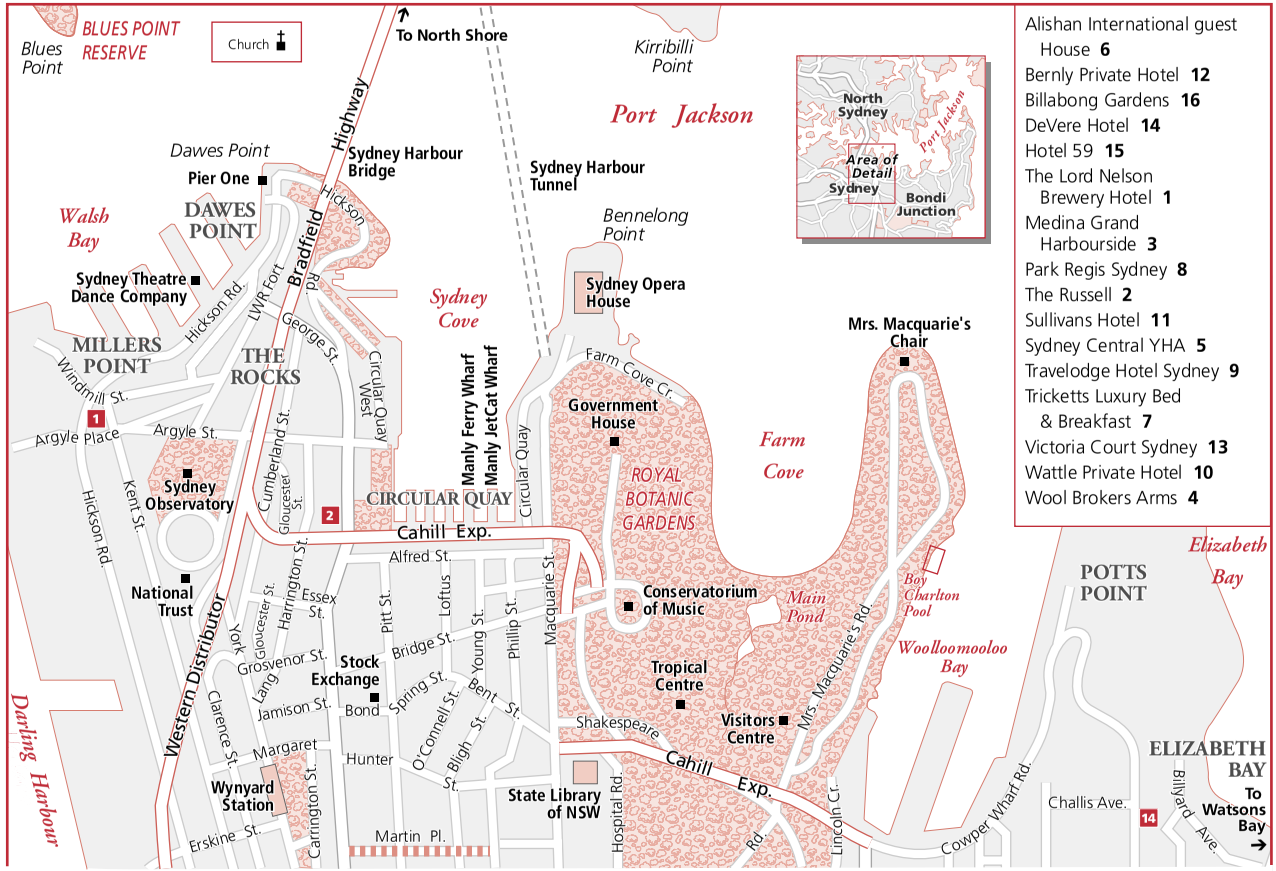
**DECIDING WHERE TO STAY** The choice location for lodging in Sydney is in The Rocks and around Circular Quay—a short stroll from the Sydney Opera House, the Harbour Bridge, the Royal Botanic Gardens, and the ferry terminals.

Hotels around Darling Harbour offer good access to the local facilities, including museums, the Sydney Aquarium, and the Star City casino. Most Darling Harbour hotels are a 10- to 15-minute walk, or a short monorail or light rail trip, from Town Hall and the central shopping district in and around the A.M.P. Centrepoint Tower and Pitt Street Mall.

More hotels are grouped around Kings Cross, Sydney's red-light district. Some of the hotels here are among the city's best, and you'll also find a range of cheaper lodgings, including several backpacker hostels. Kings Cross can be unnerving at any time, but especially on Friday and Saturday nights when the area's strip joints and nightclubs are jumping. Staying here does have its advantages: You get a real inner-city feel, and it's close to excellent restaurants and cafes around the Kings Cross, Darlinghurst, and Oxford Street areas.

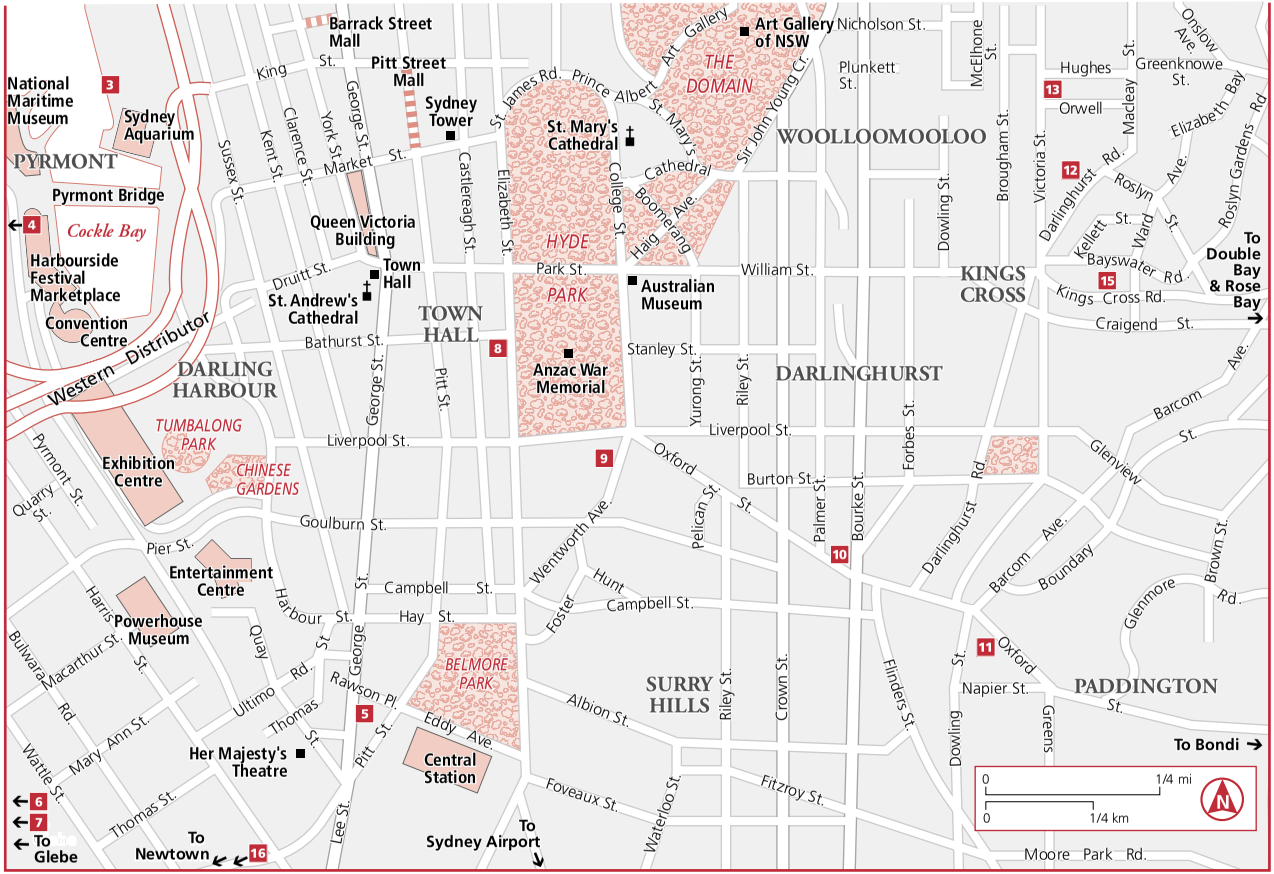
Glebe, with its ethnic restaurants, is another inner-city suburb popular with tourists. It's well served by local buses.

If you want to stay near the beach, check out the options in Manly and Bondi, though you should consider their distance from the city center and the lack of CityRail trains to these areas. However, ferries do run to Manly (though they stop before midnight), and you can take a train/bus combination to Bondi. A taxi to Manly from the city will cost around A$35 (US$28) and to Bondi around A$26 (US$21).




## Where to Stay in Central Sydney

Alishan International guest House **6**
Bernly Private Hotel **12**
Billabong Gardens **16**
DeVere Hotel **14**
Hotel 59 **15**
The Lord Nelson Brewery Hotel **1**
Medina Grand Harbourside **3**
Park Regis Sydney **8**
The Russell **2**
Sullivans Hotel **11**
Sydney Central YHA **5**
Travelodge Hotel Sydney **9**
Tricketts Luxury Bed & Breakfast **7**
Victoria Court Sydney **13**
Wattle Private Hotel **10**
Wool Brokers Arms **4**


Barrack Street Mall
Pitt Street Mall
Sydney Tower
Art Gallery of NSW
Nicholson St.
THE DOMAIN
Plunkett St.
McElhone St.
Hughes
Greenknowe St.
Onslow Ave.
Orwell
Macleay St.
Elizabeth Bay Rd.
National Maritime Museum
Sydney Aquarium
PYRMONT
Pyrmont Bridge
Cockle Bay
Harbourside Festival Marketplace
Convention Centre
Western Distributor
King St.
Sussex St.
Kent St.
Clarence St.
York St.
George St.
Market St.
St. James Rd.
Prince Albert St.
St. Mary's Cathedral
Sir John Young Cr.
WOOLLOOMOOLOO
Dowling St.
Brougham St.
Victoria St.
Darlinghurst Rd.
Roslyn Ave.
Roslyn Gardens
Kellett St.
Ward St.
To Double Bay & Rose Bay
Bayswater Rd.
Kings Cross Rd.
Craigend St.
KINGS CROSS
Queen Victoria Building
Castlereagh St.
Elizabeth St.
College St.
Boomerang
Haig Ave.
HYDE PARK
Park St.
William St.
Australian Museum
Druitt St.
Town Hall
St. Andrew's Cathedral
TOWN HALL
Bathurst St.
Anzac War Memorial
Stanley St.
DARLINGHURST
DARLING HARBOUR
George St.
Pitt St.
Yurong St.
Riley St.
Forbes St.
Barcom Ave.
TUMBALONG PARK
Liverpool St.
Exhibition Centre
CHINESE GARDENS
Pyrmont St.
Quarry St.
Oxford St.
Burton St.
Glenview St.
Goulburn St.
Pelican St.
Palmer St.
Bourke St.
Darlinghurst Rd.
Pier St.
Entertainment Centre
Wentworth Ave.
Hunt St.
Campbell St.
Foster St.
Harbour St.
Hay St.
Barcom Ave.
Boundary St.
Brown St.
Glenmore Rd.
Harris St.
Powerhouse Museum
Quay St.
Macarthur St.
Bulwara Rd.
Ultimo Rd.
Rawson Pl.
Thomas St.
Eddy Ave.
BELMORE PARK
SURRY HILLS
Albion St.
Riley St.
Crown St.
Flinders St.
Oxford St.
Napier St.
PADDINGTON
Greens St.
Dowling St.
Her Majesty's Theatre
Central Station
Pitt St.
Mary Ann St.
Wattle St.
Thomas St.
Lee St.
Foveaux St.
Waterloo St.
Fitzroy St.
To Bondi
To Glebe
To Newtown
To Sydney Airport
Moore Park Rd.
0
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N

**MAKING A DEAL** The prices given below for hotels are mostly the **rack rates,** the recommended retail price, which guests can pay at the busiest periods if they book at short notice. Always ask about discounts, package deals, and any other special offerings when booking a hotel, especially if you are traveling in winter when hotels are less likely to be full. Ask about weekend discounts, corporate rates, and family plans.

Booking direct through a hotel's website can also yield savings. For instance, a search of the website for Accor, a company that manages 31 quality hotels in and around Sydney, shows that you could save up to 50% of the rack rate. A double room at the four-star Mercure Hotel Sydney on Broadway, for example, can cost A$157 (US$126), including breakfast. The rack rate is A$220 (US$176) a night. A night at the four-star All Seasons Premier Menzies Hotel, near Wynyard, costs A$148 (US$118) for a double room, including breakfast. The rack rate is A$300 (US$240). On the Accor website (www.accor.com), you can check rates months in advance.

**Serviced apartments** are also well worth considering because you can save a bundle by cooking your own meals; many also have free laundry facilities.

Almost all hotels offer nonsmoking rooms; inquire when you make a reservation if it's important to you. Most moderately priced to very expensive rooms will have tea- and coffee-making facilities, and an iron. Like hotels elsewhere, some of Sydney's lodgings are in on the increasing trend to rip off guests with pay-per-view movie channels (around A$16/US$13 per movie), rather than to provide full access to a range of free cable TV channels.

In Australia, a "double" room means you get one double, queen-size, or king-size bed in a room. Americans used to having coffee machines in their rooms will be generally disappointed. They are very uncommon. Usually you get tea bags and coffee-sachets to add to hot water from the kettle.

## THE ROCKS/CIRCULAR QUAY

### The Lord Nelson Brewery Hotel

Sydney's oldest pub was established in 1841 after serving as a private residence since its construction in 1836. It's an attractive, three-story sandstone building with a busy pub on the ground floor, a good brasserie on the second, and hotel accommodations on the third. The rooms were totally renovated in 1999. They're compact, but spacious enough to swing your bags around without hitting the walls. From its creaky floorboards and bedroom walls made from convict-hewn sandstone blocks, to the narrow corridors, the wood fire, and the homemade beer in the bar, The Lord Nelson positively wallows in colonial atmosphere.

At the corner of Kent and Argyle sts., The Rocks, Sydney, NSW 2000. ✆ **02/9251 4044.** Fax 02/9251 1532. www.lordnelson.com.au. 9 units, 8 with bathroom. A$120 (US$96) double without bathroom; A$180 (US$144) double with bathroom. Extra person A$30 (US$24). Rates include continental breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. No parking available. CityRail or ferry: Circular Quay. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; bar. *In room:* TV, fax, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

### The Russell ★★ *Finds*

This is the coziest place to stay in The Rocks, and perhaps in all of Sydney. It's more than 100 years old, and it shows its age wonderfully in the creaks of the floorboards and the ramshackle feel of the brightly painted corridors. Every room is different in style, size, and shape; all come with a queen-size bed, and most have cable TV. (Others can have a TV moved in if requested.) All rooms have immense character, including a series of rooms added on in 1990 above the Fortune of War Hotel next door. There are no harbor views, but from some rooms you can see the tops of the ferry terminals at Circular Quay. Guests have the use of a comfortable

sitting room, a living room with magazines and books, and a rooftop garden. The apartment is a large, open unit with a king-size bed and small kitchen; it's suitable for three people (there's a double sofa bed). It overlooks Circular Quay.

143A George St., The Rocks, Sydney, NSW 2000. ✆ **02/9241 3543.** Fax 02/9252 1652. www.therussell.com.au. 29 units, 19 with bathroom. A$140–A$195 (US$112–US$156) double without bathroom; A$235–A$290 (US$188–US$232) double with bathroom; A$320 (US$256) suite or apt. Extra person A$15 (US$12). Rates include continental breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. No parking available. CityRail or ferry: Circular Quay. **Amenities:** Restaurant; lounge. *In room:* TV, coffeemaker, iron.

## CITY CENTER

**Park Regis Sydney** This hotel occupies the top 15 floors of a 45-story building and is well placed in the central business district, just 2 blocks from Hyde Park and Town Hall. There's nothing spectacular about it, but the rooms are light, modern, and practical. Many of the guests are business travelers, which gives the hotel a corporate feel. Nevertheless, it's a relatively good value considering the location. Rooms at the front have views over the city and park.

27 Park St. (at Castlereagh St.), Sydney, NSW 2000. ✆ **1800/221 138** in Australia, or 02/9267 6511. Fax 02/9264 2252. www.parkregissydney.com.au. 120 units (all with shower only). A$165 (US$132) double; A$198 (US$158) suite. Extra person A$22 (US$18). Children under 14 stay free in parent's room. Aussie auto club discounts available. AE, DC, MC, V. Car parking A$20 (US$16). CityRail: Town Hall. Monorail: Park Plaza. **Amenities:** Small heated outdoor pool; concierge; tour desk; 24-hr. room service; babysitting; laundry service; dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer.

**Sydney Central YHA** ★★ *Value* This multiple-award-winning hostel is one of the biggest and busiest in the world. With a 98% year-round occupancy rate, you'll have to book early. It's in a historic nine-story building and offers far more than standard basic accommodations. In the basement is the Scu Bar, a popular drinking hole with pool tables and occasional entertainment. There's also an entertainment room with more pool tables and e-mail facilities, TV rooms on every floor, and an audiovisual room that shows movies. Rooms are clean and basic. Three dorm rooms hold eight people each; 24 sleep up to six; and 70 accommodate four. The YHA is accessible to travelers with disabilities.

A new hostel, the Railway Square YHA, 8–10 Lee St. (at the corner of Upper Carriage Lane, or enter via the Henry Dean Plaza), Sydney, NSW 2000 (✆ **02/9281 9666;** fax 02/9281 9688), opened in 2004. The 64-bed hostel offers four-to eight-bed dorms and 10 double rooms in an historic 1904 building adjoining "Platform Zero" at Central Railway Station. Some dorm rooms are even located in railway carriages. There's a spa pool, an Internet cafe, a tour desk, indoor and outdoor communal areas, and a self-catering kitchen. Dorm rooms cost from A$27 to A$33 (US$22–US$26) a night, doubles with shared bathroom A$78 (US$62), and doubles with private bathroom A$88 (US$70).

There are more than 140 YHA hostels in Australia. Check the website for the full list, which includes other hostels in Sydney, such as the **Glebe Point YHA,** the **Sydney Beachhouse YHA** in the beachside suburb of Collaroy, and **Pittwater YHA** (accessible only by boat, and a fabulous way to experience the "bush" around Sydney) in Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park.

11 Rawson Place (at Pitt St., outside Central Station), Sydney, NSW 2000. ✆ **02/9281 9111.** Fax 02/9281 9199. www.yha.com.au. 97 dorm units with 448 beds; 54 twin units, 43 with bathroom. A$28–A$33 (US$22–US$26) dorm bed; A$82 (US$66) twin without bathroom; A$94 (US$75) twin with bathroom. Non-YHA members are charged an extra A$3.50 (US$2.80) extra per night. MC, V. Parking A$12 (US$9.60). CityRail: Central. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; small heated outdoor pool; sauna; 2 kitchens; TV room. *In room:* No phone.

**Travelodge Hotel Sydney** ★ This business-oriented hotel is cheap for Sydney, comfortable, and well located—making it a good option for some travelers. The rooms are motel-like in appearance, with a queen-size bed or twin beds. Many come with a sofa. From here it's a short walk to Oxford Street, Town Hall, Hyde Park, and the monorail to Darling Harbour.

27–33 Wentworth Ave., Sydney, NSW 2000. ✆ **02/8267 1700.** Fax 02/8267 1800. www.travelodge.com.au. 406 units. A$119 (US$95) double or twin. Extra person A$16 (US$13). AE, DC, MC, V. Parking around corner A$17 (US$14). CityRail: Museum. **Amenities:** Restaurant; massage; babysitting; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, kitchenette, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

## AT DARLING HARBOUR

### WORTH A SPLURGE

**Medina Grand Harbourside** ★★ Medina offers good package and weekend rates on its website, which means this place can work out to be a bargain. The flagship is the Medina Grand Harbourside, an impressive serviced hotel offering modern, very comfortable rooms at competitive prices. It's a little oddly placed—reached by an offshoot road and a short, unattractive walk from the Sydney Aquarium in Darling Harbour—but it makes up for it by being close to all of the Darling Harbour, Cockle Bay, and Town Hall attractions and shops. You can choose between studio and one-bedroom apartments, which all come with Italian designer furniture, large windows, and balconies (some with good harbor views). Studio units come with a kitchenette, and one-bedroom units come with a fully equipped kitchen and a second TV. All have dataports. Higher prices in the ranges below are for waterview units.

Associated with the Medina hotels are the funkier Vibe hotels (www.vibehotels.com.au). In Sydney there are **Vibe Hotel Goulburn** (✆ **02/9282 0988**) at 111 Goulburn St., close to Central Station; **Vibe Hotel North Sydney** (✆ **02/9955 1111**) at 88 Alfred St., Milsons Point, just over the Harbour Bridge and near the CityRail station; and its lovely four-star flagship hotel, **Vibe Hotel Rushcutters Bay** (✆ **02/8353 8988**) at 100 Bayswater Rd., Rushcutters Bay, on the waterfront quite near the Kings Cross CityRail station. At the time of writing both the North Sydney and Goulburn Street hotels were open but being updated. Check the Vibe website for deals (rooms go for as little as A$149/US$119), or the www.lastminute.com.au and www.wotif.com websites. Both Vibe and Medina have hotels in Melbourne.

Corner of Shelley and King sts., King St. Wharf, Sydney, NSW 2000. ✆ **1300/300 232** in Australia, or 02/9249 7000. Fax 02/9249 6900. www.medinaapartments.com.au. 114 units. A$238–A$254 (US$190–US$203) studio; A$265–A$330 (US$212–US$264) 1-bedroom apt. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking A$28 (US$22). CityRail: Town Hall. **Amenities:** Small heated indoor pool; exercise room; concierge; tour desk; business center; laundry service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, kitchenette, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

**Wool Brokers Arms** You'll find this friendly 1886 heritage building on the far side of Darling Harbour, next to the prominent AAA-rated four-star Novotel hotel and hidden behind a monstrous aboveground parking garage. It's on a noisy road, so unless you're used to traffic, avoid the rooms at the front. Rooms are simply furnished, with a double bed and a sink. Room no. 3 is one of the nicer ones. Family rooms have a king-size bed, a set of bunks, and two singles through an open doorway. There are 19 shared bathrooms. It's adequate for a few nights.

22 Allen St., Pyrmont, Sydney, NSW 2009. ✆ **02/9552 4773.** Fax 02/9552 4771. www.ozemail.com.au/~woolbrokers. 26 units, none with bathroom. A$89 (US$71) double; A$110 (US$88) triple; A$130 (US$104) family room for 4. Rates include continental breakfast. Extra person A$20 (US$16). AE, MC, V. Parking A$11 (US$8.80) nearby. Bus: 501 from

central business district or Central Station. Light Rail: Convention Centre. **Amenities:** Tour desk; coin-op laundry; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* TV.

## IN KINGS CROSS & THE SUBURBS BEYOND

**Bernly Private Hotel** *Finds* This place, tucked just off Darlinghurst Road, is a find. It's a rabbit warren of rooms run by a friendly staff, catering to everyone from short-term travelers to newly arrived immigrants. All rooms are new and clean. The more expensive rooms are superior to most others of their price in the area. Budget rooms are a bit scruffier and smaller than the standards, but are perfectly livable. Some come with a microwave oven, and all have a small TV. Backpacker rooms have two sets of bunk beds, though just two people seem to occupy most. Some of the backpacker rooms have a shower. There's a rooftop sun deck and a lounge with cable TV. Five family rooms come with double beds and two singles.

15 Springfield Ave., Potts Point, NSW 2011. ✆ **02/9358 3122.** Fax 02/9356 4405. www.bernlyprivatehotel.com.au. 95 units, 12 with bathroom. A$66 (US$53) budget double without bathroom; A$99 (US$79) double with bathroom; A$132 (US$106) triple with bathroom; A$154 (US$123) family room with bathroom; A$25 (US$20) dorm bed. Additional person A$22 (US$18) extra. AE, DC, MC, V. Metered street parking. CityRail: Kings Cross. **Amenities:** TV lounge. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, coffeemaker, iron.

**DeVere Hotel** The DeVere has been recommended by several readers who commented on the friendly staff and the bargain-basement prices when booked at the Tourism New South Wales Travel Centre at the Sydney airport. Although the rooms are very modern, they are a little too standard gray for my liking (although the owner says some are now yellow). Superior rooms are a bit larger, and the executive room is larger still and comes with nicer furniture. They are certainly a bargain compared with similar, but far more expensive, rooms elsewhere in Sydney. The suites have views of Elizabeth Bay, a Jacuzzi, and a king-size bed rather than a queen-size. Some suites have a kitchenette with no cooking facilities. Some standard rooms have an extra single bed. Breakfast is available; prices start at A$8 (US$6.40).

44–46 Macleay St., Potts Point, NSW 2011. ✆ **1800/818 790** in Australia, 0800/441 779 in New Zealand, or 02/9358 1211. Fax 02/9358 4685. www.devere.com.au. 100 units. A$150 (US$120) double; A$195 (US$156) superior room; A$225 (US$180) executive room or studio; A$280 (US$224) suite. Extra person A$45 (US$36). Check website for packages. Children under 12 stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking at nearby Landmark Hotel A$12 (US$9.60) per exit. CityRail: Kings Cross. Bus: 311 from Circular Quay. **Amenities:** Tour desk; car-rental desk; business center; laundry service; dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer.

**Hotel 59** *Kids* This popular and friendly B&B is well worth considering if you want to be near the Kings Cross action but far enough away to get a decent night's sleep. Deluxe rooms have a queen- or king-size bed and a tub/shower, while the smaller standard rooms come with a double bed and a shower. The two large superior rooms come with a separate living room, two single beds, and two more singles that can be locked together to form a king-size. One superior room comes with a small kitchen with a microwave and hot plates. All rooms are well kept and comfortable, with private bathrooms. The cafe below serves breakfast. A flight of stairs and the lack of an elevator might make this a bad choice for travelers with disabilities.

59 Bayswater Rd., Kings Cross, NSW 2011. ✆ **02/9360 5900.** Fax 02/9360 1828. www.hotel59.com.au. 8 units (some with shower only). A$115 (US$92) standard double; A$125 (US$100) deluxe double; A$135 (US$108) superior room. Extra person A$15 (US$12), extra child 2–12 A$10 (US$8). Rates include cooked breakfast. MC, V. No parking. CityRail: Kings Cross. **Amenities:** Cafe; TV lounge; tour desk; car-rental desk; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, kitchen, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

**Victoria Court Sydney** ★ *Value* This cute, well-priced place is made up of two 1881 terrace houses joined together. It's near a string of backpacker hostels and popular cafes on a leafy street running parallel to sleazy Darlinghurst Road. The glass-roofed breakfast room on the ground floor is a work of art, decked out with hanging ferns, giant bamboo, wrought-iron tables and chairs, and a trickling fountain. Just off this space is a peaceful guest lounge stacked with books and newspapers. The very plush rooms come with either king- or queen-size beds, but lack a tub in the bathroom. There's a coin-op laundry just down the road.

122 Victoria St., Potts Point, NSW 2011. ✆ **1800/630 505** in Australia, or 02/9357 3200. Fax 02/9357 7606. www.victoriacourt.com.au. 22 units. A$75–A$115 (US$60–US$92) double; A$165 (US$132) deluxe double with sun deck; A$250 (US$200) honeymoon suite with balcony. Extra person A$20 (US$16). Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free secure parking. CityRail: Kings Cross. **Amenities:** Guest lounge. *In room:* A/C, TV.

## OXFORD STREET/DARLINGHURST

**Sullivans Hotel** About half of this boutique hotel's guests come from overseas, mainly from the United Kingdom, Europe, and the United States. There's also a small corporate following. Sullivans is right in the heart of the action in one of Sydney's most popular shopping, entertainment, restaurant, and gay pub and club areas. The hotel is particularly popular with Americans during Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras. All rooms are simple and compact, but good for a few nights. They come with an attached shower. Standard rooms have two single beds, and the garden rooms have a queen-size bed and pleasant garden views.

21 Oxford St., Paddington, NSW 2021. ✆ **02/9361 0211.** Fax 02/9360 3735. www.sullivans.com.au. 64 units. A$135 (US$108) standard double; A$150 (US$120) garden room double and triple; A$150 (US$120) family room; A$210 (US$168) two connecting rooms. AE, DC, MC, V. Limited free parking. Bus: 378 from Central Station or 380 from Circular Quay. **Amenities:** Breakfast cafe; small heated outdoor pool; free use of bikes; coin-op laundry; free Internet access. *In room:* A/C, TV w/free movies, fridge, hair dryer, iron.

**Wattle Private Hotel** *Finds* This attractive Edwardian-style house built between 1900 and 1910 offers basic to very pleasant accommodations in the increasingly fashionable inner-city suburb of Darlinghurst, known for its great cafes, nightlife, and restaurants. The hotel was renovated and refurbished in early 2004 and has changed a lot. Double rooms are rather basic and quite small, but large windows open them. Nicer and larger Queen Rooms have a queen-size bed, King Rooms have a king-size bed (some have harbor views), while a Deluxe Twin room has two king-size beds. There's also a family room that sleeps up to six people. Expect period features, such as high ceilings and ornate moldings. Rooms are on four stories, but there's no elevator, so if you don't fancy too many stairs, try to get a room on a lower floor. There's a rooftop garden with harbor and city views. The hotel was undergoing continued minor refurbishment in 2005.

108 Oxford St. (at corner of Palmer St.), Darlinghurst, NSW 2010. ✆ **02/9332 4118.** Fax 02/9331 2074. www.thewattle.com 11 units. A$99–A$159 (US$79–US$127) double; A$110–A$179 (US$88–US$143) Queen Room; A$120–A$239 (US$96–US$191) King Room, A$140–A$239 (US$112–US$191) King Room with harbor views; A$140–A$239 (US$112–US$191) Deluxe Twin Room; A$200–A$350 (US$160–US$280) Family Room. More expensive rates are for peak times and discounts are available year-round. Extra person A$29 (US$23). Rates include continental breakfast. MC, V. No parking. Bus: Any to Taylor Sq. from Circular Quay. **Amenities:** Coin-op laundry. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar.

## IN NEWTOWN

**Billabong Gardens** For that inner-city feel, you can't beat Newtown, with its busy street happenings, cheap restaurants, and grunge look. It's also easy to get to by bus or

CityRail. Billabong Gardens is just off the main drag, King Street, and earned a five-star backpackers' rating from the National Roads and Motorists' Association. Rooms are simply furnished in pine and have exposed brickwork. Besides the dormitory accommodations, you might consider the double or twin rooms, which offer pretty good value. The more expensive rooms have their own bathrooms. It's a friendly place with lots of native plants scattered around, and a pool in a pleasant courtyard. On the property are a comfortable TV lounge, a large kitchen, and a barbecue. It's very secure and offers 24-hour access. Motel-style rooms are also available.

5–11 Egan St., Newtown, NSW 2042. ✆ **02/9550 3236.** Fax 02/9550 4352. www.billabonggardens.com.au. 37 units. A$23–A$25 (US$18–US$20) dorm bed; A$66–A$88 (US$53–US$70) double or twin; A$120–A$150 (US$96–US$120) family room. MC, V. Parking A$5 (US$4). CityRail: Newtown. Bus: 422, 423, 426, or 428. **Amenities:** Small heated outdoor pool; Jacuzzi; game room; coin-op laundry; free Internet access. *In room:* No phone.

## IN GLEBE

**Alishan International Guest House** The Alishan is a quiet place with a real Aussie feel. It's at the city end of Glebe Point Road, just 10 minutes by bus from the shops around Town Hall. It's a mixture of upmarket youth hostel and typical guesthouse. Standard dorm rooms are spotless, light and bright, and come with two sets of bunks. Doubles have a double bed, a sofa and armchair, and a shower. Grab room no. 9 if you fancy sleeping on one of two single mattresses on the tatami mat floor, Japanese style.

100 Glebe Point Rd., Glebe, NSW 2037. ✆ **02/9566 4048.** Fax 02/9525 4686. www.alishan.com.au. 19 units. A$27–A$33 (US$22–US$26) dorm bed; A$99–A$115 (US$79–US$92) double; A$154 (US$123) family room. Extra person A$16 (US$13). AE, MC, V. Secured parking for 6 cars; metered street parking. Bus: 431 or 433 from George St., or Kingsford Smith Shuttle from airport. **Amenities:** Coin-op laundry; Internet access. *In room:* TV, fridge.

## WORTH A SPLURGE

**Tricketts Luxury Bed & Breakfast** ★★ As soon as I walked into this atmospheric old place, I wanted to ditch my modern Sydney apartment and move in. Your first impression as you enter the tessellated, tiled corridor of the 1880s Victorian mansion is the jumble of plants and ornaments, the high ceilings, the Oriental rugs, and the leaded windows. Guests relax over a decanter of port or with a magazine on wicker furniture on the veranda overlooking fairly busy Glebe Point Road. The guest rooms are quiet and homey. My favorites are no. 2, with its wooden floorboards and king-size bed, and no. 8 (the honeymoon suite) with a 1820s king-size four-poster bed. There's a nice courtyard out back. The owner, Liz Tricketts, is a delight and a rich source of Sydney's history.

270 Glebe Point Rd., Glebe (the water end), NSW 2037. ✆ **02/9552 1141.** Fax 02/9692 9462. www.tricketts.com.au. 7 units (all with shower only). A$198 (US$158) double; A$220 (US$176) honeymoon suite. Rates include continental breakfast. MC, V.Free parking. Bus: 431 from George St. **Amenities:** Tour desk; massage; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer.

## IN BONDI

Bondi Beach is a good place to stay if you want to be close to the surf and sand, though if you're getting around by public transport you'll need to catch a bus to Bondi Junction, then a train to the city center. (You can stay on the bus all the way, but it takes forever.)

In addition to the properties recommended below, there are two good backpacker hostels. **Indy's,** 35a Hall St. (✆ **02/9365 4900;** www.indysbackpackers.com.au), offers four- to eight-person dorm rooms for A$18 (US$14) in winter and A$22 (US$18) in summer, and double rooms in a separate building opposite North Bondi

Surf Club for the same price per person. **Noah's,** 2 Campbell Parade (✆ **02/9365 7100**), has a great ambience and offers modern four- to eight-person dorm rooms for A$24 to A$25 (US$19–US$20) as well as doubles for A$55 (US$44) and beach doubles for A$65 (US$52). Weekly rates range from A$144 to A$330 (US$115–US$264).

**Bondi Beachside Inn** ★ *Kids* With such a great location, right on the beachfront, you can't get much better value than this. A modern seven-story hotel, which prides itself on being family-friendly, the Beachside Inn has quite large rooms with compact bathrooms. The more expensive rooms have balconies with ocean views. It's well loved by return travelers, so it's advisable to book well ahead, especially during the summer.

152 Campbell Parade, Bondi Beach, NSW 2026. ✆ **02/9130 5311.** Fax 02/9365 2646. www.bondiinn.com.au. 70 units. A$120–A$140 (US$96–US$112) double. Extra adult A$25 (US$20), child A$10 (US$8). AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. Bus: 380 or 382 from Circular Quay. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, coffeemaker.

**Bondi Serviced Apartments** If you plan on staying a week or more, these pleasant, privately owned apartments could be ideal. They're on busy Bondi Road, a 25-minute walk to the beach, and opposite a post office (with phones—the apartment complex doesn't have any), an Internet parlor, and a 24-hour supermarket. The studio rooms at the front of the hotel suffer from traffic noise but are larger than the quieter ones in the back. That said, all are good size and have a nice feel about them. Each has a double bed (the front rooms also have an extra single) and a full kitchen. There's no air-conditioning (though the sea breeze does tend to cool Bondi down a bit in summer). The owner describes it as a "no frills" complex—hence the lack of phones, fax number, and credit card payments, and the cleaning service is weekly rather than daily if you book for a week or more.

164–166 Bondi Rd., Bondi Beach, NSW 2026. ✆ **02/9363 5529.** www.bondi-serviced-apartments.com.au. 12 units. A$105 (US$84) budget studio; A$120 (US$96) standard studio; A$450–A$750 (US$360–US$600) apt per week (more expensive rate is for summer). Ask about long-term discounts. No credit cards. Free parking. Bus: 380 or 382 from city center or Bondi Junction. **Amenities:** Coin-op laundry. *In room:* TV, kitchen, iron, no phone.

**Ravesi's on Bondi Beach** ★★ Right on Australia's most famous golden sands, this boutique property reopened in May 2002 after major renovations to the restaurant, bar, and many rooms. The AAA-rated three-star hotel offers modern minimalist rooms with white marble bathrooms—all very chic, with African tribal wall hangings. Standard doubles are spacious; there's a one-bedroom suite and a split-level one-bedroom option with the bedroom upstairs. Room nos. 5 and 6 and the split-level suite have the best views of the ocean. All rooms have Juliet balconies, and the split-level suite has its own terrace. If you're a light sleeper, request a room on the top floor, because the popular **Ravesi's Restaurant** can be quite noisy on busy nights. An attractive glass-sided ground-floor bar is the in place on the Bondi scene, with lounge, house, and chill music every evening. The bar is a great place to watch the outside street scene.

Corner of Hall St. and Campbell Parade, Bondi Beach, NSW 2026. ✆ **02/9365 4422.** Fax 02/9365 1481. www.ravesis.com.au. 16 units. A$125 (US$100) standard double; A$230 (US$184) double with side view; A$295 (US$236) beachfront double; A$275 (US$220) 1-bedroom suite; A$275–A$350 (US$220–US$280) split-level suite with terrace. Extra person A$30 (US$24). 2 children under 12 stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking at the Swiss-Grand Hotel nearby A$8 (US$6.40). CityRail: Bondi Junction; then bus no. 380. Bus: 380 from Circular Quay. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; tour desk; 24-hr. room service; laundry service; dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, hair dryer, iron, safe.

## IN MANLY

If you decide to stay in my favorite beachside suburb, be aware that ferries from the city stop running at midnight. If you get stranded, you'll be facing an expensive taxi ride (around A$40/US$32), or you'll need to make your way to the bus stand behind the Wynyard CityRail station to catch a night bus. Consider buying a multiple-ride ticket, which will save you lots of money if you're staying in Manly for a few days.

Manly has several backpacker places that are worth checking out. The best is **Manly Backpackers Beachside,** 28 Ragland St. (✆ **02/9977 3411;** fax 02/9977 4379; www.manlybackpackers.com.au), which offers dorm beds from A$22 to A$27 (US$18–US$22), doubles from A$52 to A$62 (US$42–US$50). The hostel charges an A$30 (US$24) refundable key deposit.

**Manly Lodge** ★ *Kids* At first sight this ramshackle building halfway between the main beach and the harbor doesn't look like much. But don't let the tattiness—especially the cramped, hostel-like foyer bristling with tourist brochures—put you off. Some of the rooms are lovely, and the whole place has a nice atmosphere and plenty of character. Double rooms are not exceptional. They come with a double bed, stone or carpet floors, a TV and VCR, and either a Jacuzzi or a tub/shower combination. Some of the standard doubles and all of the deluxe doubles have a kitchen. Family rooms have a set of bunk beds and a double in one room, and a shower. Family suites are very classy; each has a Jacuzzi, a small kitchen area, one double and three singles in the bedroom, and two sofa beds in the living area. The lodge also has table tennis and even an Olympic-size trampoline. For purposes of setting room rates, peak season is defined as Christmas, Easter, and school holidays.

22 Victoria Parade, Manly, NSW 2095. ✆ **02/9977 8655.** Fax 02/9976 2090. www.manlylodge.com.au. 24 units. Standard double A$132–A$154 (US$106–US$123) peak season, A$108–A$132 (US$86–US$106) off season; deluxe double A$154–A$198 (US$123–US$158) peak season, A$132–A$154 (US$106–US$123) off season; family suite A$264–A$330 (US$211–US$264) peak season, A$187–A$262 (US$150–US$210) off season. Extra person A$30 (US$24), extra child under 10 A$17 (US$14). Ask about weekly rates and off-season discounts. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, MC, V. Free parking. Ferry or JetCat: Manly. **Amenities:** Exercise room; Jacuzzi; sauna; coin-op laundry. *In room:* A/C, TV.

**Manly Paradise Motel and Beach Plaza Apartments** ★ I walked into this place after taking a look around the modern Manly Waterfront Apartment Hotel next door and immediately felt more at home here. The motel and apartment complex are separate but share a reception area. The irregularly shaped rooms are big yet cozy and come with a shower and a springy double bed. Though there is no restaurant, you can get breakfast in bed; a simple breakfast costs about A$10 (US$8). My only concern is that the traffic can make it a little noisy during the day (but you'll probably be on the beach then, anyway). Some rooms have glimpses of the sea. Residents of the apartment complex share the swimming pool (with views) on the roof.

The apartments are magnificent—very roomy, with thick carpets. They're stocked with everything you need, including a washing machine and dryer, a full kitchen with dishwasher, and two bathrooms (one with a tub). The sea views from the main front balcony are heart-stopping.

54 North Steyne, Manly, NSW 2095. ✆ **1800/815 789** in Australia, or 02/9977 5799. Fax 02/9977 6848. www.manlyparadise.com.au. 40 units (some with shower only). A$105–A$165 (US$84–US$132) double motel unit; A$295 (US$236) 2-bedroom apt. Extra person A$25 (US$20). Ask about long-term discounts. AE, DC, MC, V. Free secured parking. Ferry or JetCat: Manly. **Amenities:** Indoor heated pool; dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, hair dryer, iron.

**Periwinkle–Manly Cove Guesthouse** Nicely positioned across the road from one of Manly's two harbor beaches, the Periwinkle is a short walk from the ferry, the shops along the Corso, and the main ocean beach. Rooms are small and come with a double bed. Some have a shower and toilet (these go for the higher prices noted below), but otherwise you'll have to make do with one of four separate bathrooms. (One has a tub.) A full kitchen next to a pleasant-enough communal lounge means you could save money by not eating out. Room nos. 5 and 10 are the nicest and have screened balconies overlooking the harbor (but no bathrooms). For atmosphere, I prefer the Manly Lodge (see above). No smoking inside.

18–19 E. Esplanade, Manly, NSW 2095. ✆ **02/9977 4668.** Fax 02/9977 6308. www.periwinkle.citysearch.com.au. 18 units, 12 with bathroom. A$135 (US$108) double without bathroom; A$165 (US$132) double with bathroom. Units with harbor views A$10 (US$8) extra. Extra person A$25 (US$20). Rates include continental breakfast. MC, V. Free parking. Ferry or JetCat: Manly. **Amenities:** Coin-op laundry; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* TV, fridge.

## AT THE AIRPORT

**Stamford Sydney Airport** ★★ This is the best airport hotel. Opened in 1992, it has the largest rooms, each with a king-size bed or two doubles, access to airport information, and a good-size bathroom with tub. The location is 7 minutes from the airport, and pickup service is free. Day-use rates are A$85 (US$68) for 2 to 4 hours and A$115 (US$92) for 4 to 8 hours.

Corner of O'Riordan and Robey sts. (P.O. Box 353, Mascot, Sydney, NSW 2020). ✆ **1300/301 391** in Australia, or 02/9317 2200. Fax 02/9317 3855. www.stamford.com.au. 314 units. A$270 (US$216) double; from A$370 (US$296) suite. Extra person A$25 (US$20). Children under 17 stay free in parent's room. Ask about discount packages and weekend rates. AE, DC, MC, V. A$5 (US$4) self-parking for up to 10 days. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; bar; good-size outdoor pool; fitness center; Jacuzzi; sauna; concierge; business center; currency exchange; 24-hr. room service; babysitting; laundry service; nonsmoking rooms; executive rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

# 4 Where to Dine

Sydney is a gourmet paradise, with an abundance of fresh seafood, a vast range of vegetables and fruit always in season, prime meats at inexpensive prices, and top-quality chefs making international names for themselves. Asian and Mediterranean cooking have had a major influence on Australian cuisine, with spices and herbs finding their way into most dishes. Immigration has brought with it almost every type of cuisine you can imagine, from African to Tibetan, from Russian to Vietnamese. Some areas of the city are dedicated to one type of food, while other areas are melting pots of styles.

Sydney is a great place to try Modern Australian, or "Mod Oz," cuisine, which has been applauded by chefs and food critics around the world. Modern Australian cuisine emphasizes fresh ingredients and a creative blend of European styles with Asian influences. (Some foodies complain that some restaurants use the label "Modern Australian" as an excuse to serve skimpy portions—like one lamb chop atop a tiny mound of mashed potatoes sprinkled with curry sauce.) At its best, Modern Australian food is world-class, but you'll probably have to go to the best of Sydney's restaurants to see what the scene is all about.

Australians favor Italian-style coffee. Ask for a latte if you just want a brew with milk. "Bottomless" cups of coffee are rare in Australia. By the way, in Australia, the first course is called the entree and the second course the main.

## NEAR CIRCULAR QUAY

**Botanic Gardens Restaurant** MODERN AUSTRALIAN You couldn't ask for a better walk to a restaurant than through the Royal Botanic Gardens, next to the Sydney

Opera House. Enjoying lunch on the wisteria-covered balcony in the middle of Sydney's most beautiful park is a treat every visitor should enjoy. Main courses include the very popular white sausage *(boudin blanc)* with lentils and braised fennel. Try perfect crème brûlée with underlying plum purée for dessert (A$12/US$9.60).

In the Royal Botanic Gardens. ✆ **02/9241 2419.** Reservations recommended. Main courses A$22–A$28 (US$18–US$22). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily noon–3pm. Bus or ferry: Circular Quay.

**City Extra** ITALIAN/AUSTRALIAN Because this place stays open 24 hours, it's convenient if you get the munchies at a ridiculous hour. It's also right next to the Manly ferry terminal. The plastic chairs and outdoor tables make it a pleasant spot to while away an inexpensive meal. A range of pastas are available, as well as salads, pies, steaks, ribs, fish, and Asian-influenced dishes. There's also a fat selection of desserts. The food is much nicer and a better value next door at Rossini (see below).

Shop E4, Circular Quay. ✆ **02/9241 1422.** Reservations not accepted. Main courses A$13–A$26 (US$10–US$21). 10% surcharge Mon–Sat midnight–6am, Sun, and public holidays. AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 24 hr. CityRail, bus, or ferry: Circular Quay.

**Portobello Caffé** PIZZA/SANDWICHES Sharing the address of the Sydney Cove Oyster Bar (and the same priceless views), the Portobello Caffé offers first-class gourmet sandwiches on Italian wood-fired bread, small but delicious gourmet pizzas, breakfast croissants, snacks, cakes, and hot and cold drinks. Walk off with sensational ice cream in a cone for around A$3 (US$2.40).

No. 1 Eastern Esplanade, Circular Quay East. ✆ **02/9247 8548.** Main courses A$8 (US$6.40). 10% surcharge Sun and public holidays. AE, DC, MC, V. Minimum credit card purchase A$30 (US$24). Daily 8am–11:50pm. CityRail, bus, or ferry: Circular Quay.

**Rossini** ★ *Kids* ITALIAN This cafeteria-style Italian restaurant opposite Ferry Wharf No. 5 at Circular Quay is wonderfully positioned for people-watching. The

*Value* **What to Know About BYO**

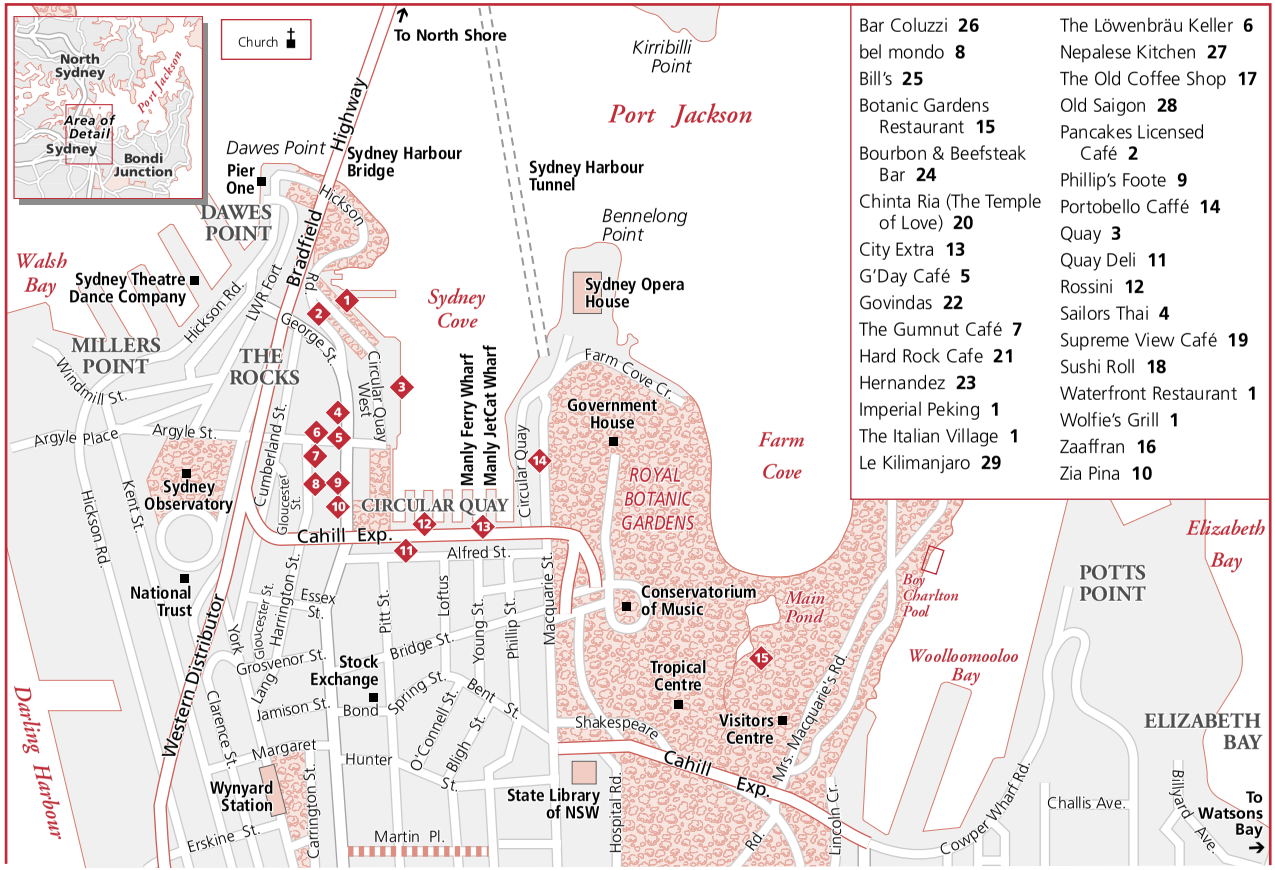
Most moderate and inexpensive restaurants in Sydney are **BYO,** as in "bring your own" bottle, though some places also have extensive wine and beer lists. More moderately priced restaurants are introducing corkage fees, which mean you pay anywhere from A$2 to A$4 (US$1.60–US$3.20) per person for the privilege of the waiter opening your bottle of wine. Very expensive restaurants discourage BYO.

Sydney's **cheap eats** congregate in inner-city areas such as along King Street in Newtown, Crown Street in Darlinghurst, and Glebe Point Road in Glebe. There are also inexpensive joints scattered among the more upscale restaurants in Kings Cross and along trendy Oxford Street.

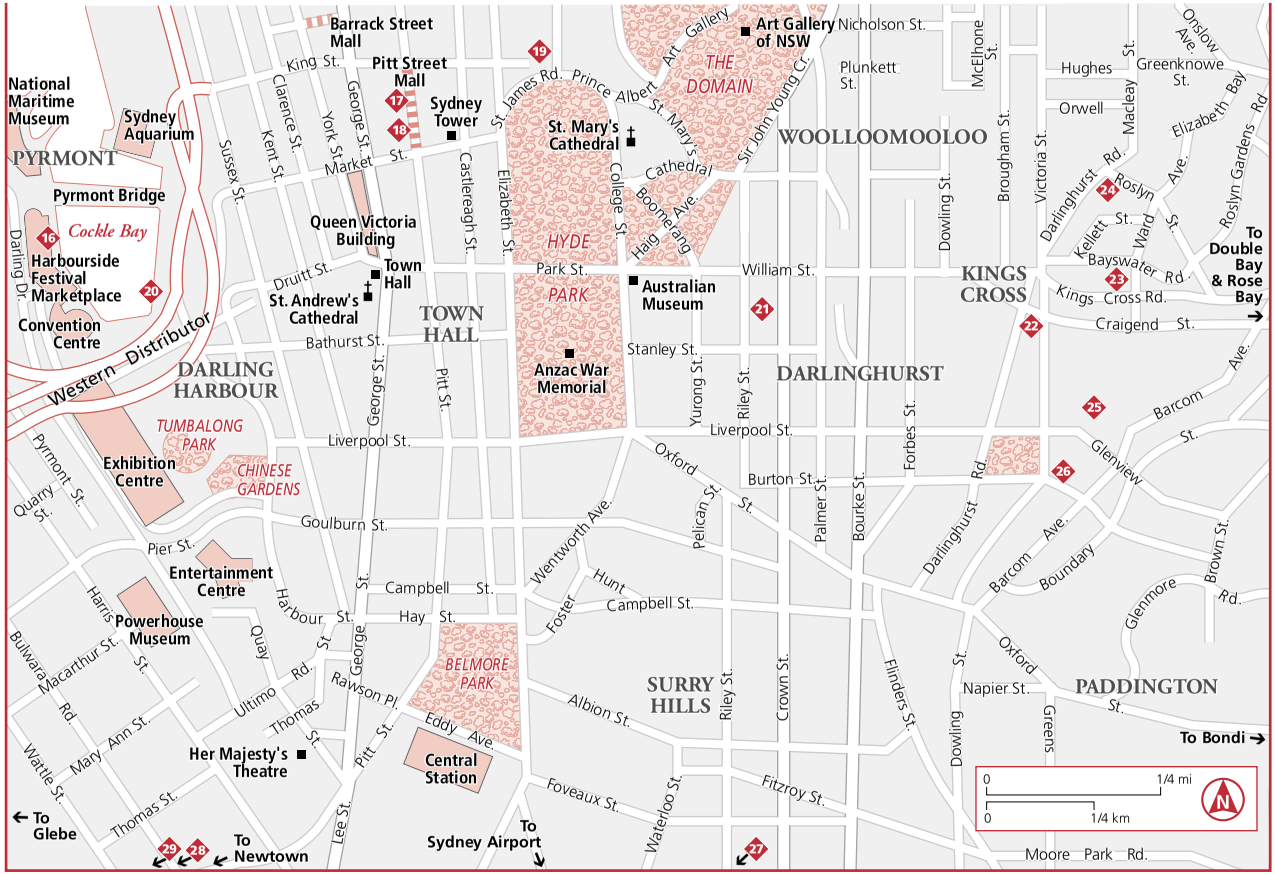
I would avoid the takeout booths along the ferry wharves at Circular Quay, after revelations that some of them harbored nasty bugs. The fish-and-chip shop opposite the "bottle shop" (liquor store) is an exception—it serves some of the best french fries in Sydney.

Smoking is banned in all Sydney restaurants, except if you're eating at a sidewalk table.

# Where to Dine in Sydney




Bar Coluzzi **26**
bel mondo **8**
Bill's **25**
Botanic Gardens Restaurant **15**
Bourbon & Beefsteak Bar **24**
Chinta Ria (The Temple of Love) **20**
City Extra **13**
G'Day Café **5**
Govindas **22**
The Gumnut Café **7**
Hard Rock Cafe **21**
Hernandez **23**
Imperial Peking **1**
The Italian Village **1**
Le Kilimanjaro **29**
The Löwenbräu Keller **6**
Nepalese Kitchen **27**
The Old Coffee Shop **17**
Old Saigon **28**
Pancakes Licensed Café **2**
Phillip's Foote **9**
Portobello Caffé **14**
Quay **3**
Quay Deli **11**
Rossini **12**
Sailors Thai **4**
Supreme View Café **19**
Sushi Roll **18**
Waterfront Restaurant **1**
Wolfie's Grill **1**
Zaaffran **16**
Zia Pina **10**


National Maritime Museum
Sydney Aquarium
PYRMONT
Pyrmont Bridge
Cockle Bay
Harbourside Festival Marketplace
Convention Centre
Darling Dr.
Western Distributor
Sussex St.
Kent St.
Clarence St.
King St.
Barrack Street Mall
Pitt Street Mall
Sydney Tower
York St.
George St.
Market St.
Queen Victoria Building
Druitt St.
Town Hall
St. Andrew's Cathedral
Bathurst St.
DARLING HARBOUR
TUMBALONG PARK
Exhibition Centre
CHINESE GARDENS
Pyrmont St.
Quarry St.
Liverpool St.
George St.
Pitt St.
TOWN HALL
Castlereagh St.
Elizabeth St.
St James Rd.
Prince Albert St.
St. Mary's Cathedral
College St.
Cathedral
Boomerang
Haig Ave.
HYDE PARK
Park St.
Australian Museum
Stanley St.
Anzac War Memorial
Art Gallery
Art Gallery of NSW
THE DOMAIN
Sir John Young Cr.
Nicholson St.
Plunkett St.
WOOLLOOMOOLOO
Dowling St.
Broughman St.
McElhone St.
Victoria St.
Hughes St.
Orwell St.
Macleay St.
Onslow Ave.
Greenknowe St.
Elizabeth Bay Rd.
Roslyn Gardens
Darlinghurst Rd.
Roslyn St.
Kellett St.
Ward St.
Bayswater Rd.
KINGS CROSS
Kings Cross Rd.
Craigend St.
To Double Bay & Rose Bay
William St.
Yurong St.
Riley St.
DARLINGHURST
Forbes St.
Barcom Ave.
Glenview St.
Liverpool St.
Oxford St.
Pelican St.
Burton St.
Palmer St.
Bourke St.
Darlinghurst Rd.
Barcom Ave.
Boundary St.
Brown St.
Glenmore Rd.
Goulburn St.
Pier St.
Entertainment Centre
Harris St.
Powerhouse Museum
Harbour St.
Campbell St.
Hay St.
Wentworth Ave.
Foster St.
Hunt St.
Campbell St.
Quay St.
George St.
Bulwara Rd.
Macarthur St.
Ultimo Rd.
Rawson Pl.
BELMORE PARK
Eddy Ave.
Albion St.
SURRY HILLS
Riley St.
Crown St.
Flinders St.
Oxford St.
Napier St.
PADDINGTON
Greens St.
Dowling St.
To Bondi
Mary St.
Ann St.
Thomas St.
Wattle St.
Her Majesty's Theatre
Central Station
Pitt St.
Lee St.
Foveaux St.
Waterloo St.
Fitzroy St.
Moore Park Rd.
To Glebe
To Newtown
To Sydney Airport
0
1/4 mi
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N

### Finds A Great Place for Picnic Grub

If you're looking for something to take with you on a harbor cruise or on a stroll through the Royal Botanic Gardens, you can't go wrong with **Quay Deli,** E5 Alfred St., next to the pharmacy under the Circular Quay CityRail station, facing the road (✆ **02/9241 3571**). You'll find all sorts of goodies, including gourmet sandwiches and takeout foods such as olives, Greek dishes, pasta, salads, meat pies, and the best English-style custard tarts around. Everything is fresh and tasty. Lunch items go for A$1.80 to A$4.50 (US$1.45–US$3.60). It's open Monday through Friday from 5am to 6:45pm, Saturday from 9am to 4pm. No credit cards.

outside tables are perfect for breakfast or a quick bite before a show at the Opera House. Breakfast croissants, Italian doughnuts, muffins, and gorgeous Danish pastries cost A$2 (US$1.60), and bacon and eggs A$8 (US$6.40). Wait to be seated for lunch or dinner, make your choice, pay at the counter, take a ticket, and then pick up your food. Meals, including veal parmigiana, cannelloni, ravioli, chicken crepes, and octopus salad, are often huge. You could easily get away with one meal for two people—ask for an extra plate—and while it's not the best Italian you'll ever eat, it is tasty. Coffee fanatics rate the Rossini brew as average.

Shop W5, Circular Quay. ✆ **02/9247 8026.** Main courses A$10–A$15 (US$8–US$12). No credit cards. Daily 7am–10pm. CityRail, bus, or ferry: Circular Quay.

## THE ROCKS

**G'Day Café** *Value* CAFE FARE According to the manager, about half the tourists who visit Sydney eat at this little place in the heart of The Rocks. That's not surprising, considering it offers simple, satisfying food at around half the price you'd expect to pay in such a tourist precinct. The interior is uninspiring, but in back there's a leafy courtyard. Among the offerings are focaccia sandwiches, hearty soups, salads, burgers, lasagna, chili con carne, and beef curry.

83 George St., The Rocks. ✆ **02/9241 3644.** Main courses A$3–A$7 (US$2.40–US$5.60). AE. Sun–Thurs 5am–midnight; Fri–Sat 5am–3am. CityRail, bus, or ferry: Circular Quay.

**The Gumnut Café** *Kids* MODERN AUSTRALIAN A hearty lunch in a courtyard shaded from the sun by giant umbrellas—ah, heaven. With a great location in the heart of The Rocks, this 1890 sandstone cottage restaurant also has an extensive indoor seating area, so it's a perfect place to take a break from all that sightseeing. On weekends live jazz sets the mood. The breakfast specials (A$8.50/US$6.80) are popular with guests from surrounding hotels, and at lunchtime the cafe bustles with tourists and local office workers. Lunchtime blackboard specials cost A$11 (US$8.80). More regular fare includes the disappointing Ploughman's Lunch (why spoil a traditional English meal of bread, cheese, and pickles by limiting the bread and adding unappealing vegetables and salad?), the better chicken and leek pies, and good pasta and noodle dishes. Filling Turkish sandwiches cost A$7.70 to A$9 (US$6.15–US$7.20). The courtyard is heated in winter, making it cozy. BYO; no corkage fee.

28 Harrington St., The Rocks. ✆ **02/9247 9591.** Main courses A$8.50–A$14 (US$6.80–US$11). AE, DC, MC, V. Sun–Wed 8am–5pm; Thurs–Sat 8am–10:30pm. CityRail, bus, or ferry: Circular Quay.

**The Löwenbräu Keller** ★ BAVARIAN Renowned for celebrating Oktoberfest every day for the past 20 years, this is the place to watch Aussies let their hair down. Come for lunch and munch a club sandwich or focaccia in the glassed-off atrium while watching the daytime action of The Rocks. For a livelier scene, head here on Friday or Saturday night, when mass beer-sculling (chugging) and yodeling are accompanied by a brass band, and costumed waitresses ferry foaming beer steins about the atmospheric, cellarlike space. Options include hearty southern German and Austrian fare and no fewer than 17 varieties of German beers in bottle or on draught (tap). There's a good wine list, and, surprisingly, vegetarians have a few choices, too.

18 Argyle St. (at Playfair St.), The Rocks. ✆ **02/9247 7785.** Reservations recommended. Main courses A$15–A$22 (US$12–US$18). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 9:30am–2am (kitchen closes at 11pm). CityRail, bus, or ferry: Circular Quay.

**Pancakes Licensed Café** AMERICAN/PANCAKES Buttermilk and chocolate pancakes; French crepes filled with seafood, chicken, and mushrooms; vegetables in basil-cream sauce; and smoked ham and cheese are the most popular dishes served in this old warehouse done up in Art Deco style. Beef ribs, pastas, and pizzas are also good sellers. Breakfast is always available.

10 Hickson Rd. (enter from Hickson Rd. or George St.), The Rocks. ✆ **02/9247 6371.** Reservations not accepted. Main courses A$13–A$22 (US$10–US$18); breakfast A$8.95–A$12 (US$7.15–US$9.60). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 24 hr. CityRail, bus, or ferry: Circular Quay.

**Phillip's Foote** ★ BARBECUE Venture behind this historic pub and you'll find a courtyard strung with tables, benches, and large barbecues. Choose your own steak, lemon sole, trout, chicken, or pork, and throw it on the barbie. It's fun, it's filling, and you might even make some new friends while your meal's sizzling.

101 George St., The Rocks. ✆ **02/9241 1485.** Main courses A$23 (US$18). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Sat noon–midnight; Sun noon–10pm. CityRail, bus, or ferry: Circular Quay.

**Sailors Thai** ★ THAI With a reputation as hot as the chiles in its jungle curry, Sailors Thai canteen attracts lunchtime crowds who come to eat great-tasting noodles and the likes of pork and prawn wonton soup, red curry with lychees, and Thai salads at its one stainless steel table with some 40 chairs. Four other tables overlook the cruise-ship terminal and the quay. Downstairs, the a la carte restaurant serves inventive food that's a far cry from the fare at your average Thai restaurant, such as stir-fried pineapple curry with chiles and cashew nuts, and wonderfully glutinous coconut ash pudding, made from the ash of burnt coconuts cooked with licorice root, coconut water, rice flour, and sugar.

106 George St., The Rocks. ✆ **02/9251 2466.** Reservations required well in advance in restaurant, not accepted in canteen. Main courses A$26–A$32 (US$21–US$26) in restaurant, A$15–A$23 (US$12–US$18) in canteen. AE, DC, MC, V. Restaurant Mon–Fri noon–2pm, Mon–Sat 6–10pm; canteen daily noon–9pm. CityRail, bus, or ferry: Circular Quay.

### What's the Restaurant Surcharge?

Some Australian restaurants charge surcharges on public holidays and Sundays. Typically this can amount to an extra A$2 to up to A$6 (US$1.60–US$4.80) or more per person. Restaurants argue that it's difficult to get staff to work on these days, so they need to provide a cash incentive not to call in with a hangover from the previous night.

**Zia Pina** PIZZA/PASTA With 10 tables downstairs and another 24 upstairs, there's not much room to breathe in this cramped traditional pizzeria and spaghetti house. But squeeze in between the bare-brick walls and wallow in the clashes and clangs coming from the hardworking chefs in the kitchen. Pizzas come in two sizes; the larger feeds two people. Servings of delicious gelato go for a cool A$4 (US$3.20).

93 George St., The Rocks. ✆ **02/9247 2255.** Reservations recommended well in advance. Main courses A$9–A$22 (US$7.20–US$18). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily noon–3pm; Sun–Mon 5–9pm; Tues–Thurs 5–10:30pm; Fri–Sat 5–11:30pm. CityRail, bus, or ferry: Circular Quay.

## WORTH A SPLURGE

**Quay** ★★★ MODERN AUSTRALIAN With its enviable location on top of the cruise-ship terminal, Quay offers perhaps the loveliest view in the city, and some feel that it's Sydney's best restaurant. In good weather, the sun sparkles off the water and through the large windows; the Opera House, city skyline, North Shore suburbs, and Harbour Bridge all look magnificent. At night, when the city lights wash over the harbor and bridge and the Opera House's sails are lit up, the view is even better. Chef Peter Gilmore's menu is a revelation of French, Italian, and Australian ideas. Signature dishes include crisped pressed duck with garlic purée and porcini mushrooms, and seared yellow-fin tuna with tomato jelly, roasted eggplant, and basil oil. This restaurant has tempted all the big-name visitors to Sydney. Quay was named Restaurant of the Year in 2003 and 2004 by the *Sydney Morning Herald's Good Food Guide.*

On the upper level of the Overseas Passenger Terminal, Circular Quay West, The Rocks. ✆ **02/9251 5600.** info@quay.com.au. Reservations recommended well in advance. Main courses A$38 (US$30). A$6 (US$4.80) per-person surcharge on public holidays. AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Fri noon–2:30pm; daily 6–10pm. CityRail, bus, or ferry: Circular Quay.

**Waterfront Restaurant** ★ MODERN AUSTRALIAN You can't help but notice the mast, rigging, and sails that mark this restaurant in a converted stone warehouse. It's one of four in a row (though a Chinese restaurant was closing at the time of writing) right next to the water below the main spread of The Rocks. It's very popular at lunchtime, when businesspeople snap up the best seats outside in the sunshine. At night, with the colors of the city washing over the harbor, it can be magical. You get a choice of such things as steaks, mud crab, fish filets, or prawns. The seafood plate (A$53/US$42) includes lobsters, Balmain bugs (small, odd-looking crayfish), prawns, scallops, baby squid, fish pieces, and octopus. The food is simple and fresh, at prices that reflect the glorious position and views.

In the same building you'll find sister restaurants **Wolfie's Grill** (✆ **02/9241 5577**), which serves good chargrilled beef and seafood dishes for A$22 to A$26 (US$18–US$21), and **The Italian Village** (✆ **02/9247 6111**), which serves regional Italian cuisine for A$22 to A$30 (US$18–US$24). All three restaurants offer fantastic water views and indoor and outdoor dining.

In Campbell's Storehouse, 27 Circular Quay West, The Rocks. ✆ **02/9247 3666.** Reservations recommended. Main courses A$26–A$29 (US$21–US$23). A$3.30 (US$2.65) per person surcharge weekends and public holidays. AE, DC, MC, V. Daily noon–10:30pm. CityRail, bus, or ferry: Circular Quay.

## NEAR TOWN HALL

**Supreme View Café** ★ *Finds* CAFE If you happen to be in the city center, this fabulous, largely undiscovered restaurant and cafe is a must for the great value and the absolutely fantastic views reaching over Hyde Park and even to the harbor. It's very large inside, has panoramic windows, and serves meals from the counter. Hearty breakfasts include bacon and eggs, omelets, and cereals. All-day dishes run to sandwiches, Caesar

salad, homemade pies, pastas, and lasagna. Even if you're not hungry, it's well worth popping in for a coffee. It's particularly handy if you are staying in the lower Oxford Street area.

Level 14, Law Courts Bldg., 184 Phillip St. (Queens Sq.). ✆ **02/9230 8224.** Main courses A$8–A$13 (US$6.40–US$10); coffee and cake A$5 (US$4). No credit cards. Mon–Fri 7am–5pm. CityRail or bus: Museum.

**Sushi Roll** ✭ SUSHI The fresh, simple food at this bargain-basement takeout is a healthy alternative to the greasy edibles with which many travelers end up satisfying their hunger. A large range of sushi and nori rolls peek out from behind the counter if you turn up at lunchtime, and you can eat at the tables opposite. The gourmet sandwiches and meals available at other establishments in the food court here make it a good stopover after a morning's shopping and sightseeing.

Sydney Central Plaza (downstairs in the food court next to Myer department store on Pitt St. Mall). ✆ **02/9233 5561.** Sushi rolls A$1.70 (US$1.35) each. No credit cards. Mon–Wed and Sat 8am–7pm; Thurs 8am–10pm; Sun 10am–6pm. CityRail or bus: Town Hall.

## WORTH A SPLURGE

**Edna's Table** ✭✭ AUSTRALIAN Jennice Kersch and brother Raymond have Australian native cuisine in their hearts, and it shows. They introduce diners to such exotic specialties as crocodile and local seafood. Interesting combinations include barramundi (a freshwater fish from the Northern Territory) cooked in paperbark, carpaccio of tuna with native anise, Balmain bug (a native crayfish), and ravioli in pepper-berry sauce. One of Australia's national icons—the kangaroo—hops onto the menu. It's all served in one of Sydney's most beautiful heritage buildings—refurbished in a light and elegant style—close to the Town Hall and Queen Victoria Building.

204 Clarence St. ✆ **02/9267 3933.** Reservations recommended. Main courses A$28–A$33 (US$22–US$26). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Fri noon–3pm; Tues–Sat 6–10pm. CityRail: Town Hall. Monorail: City Centre.

## DARLING HARBOUR/COCKLE BAY

**Chinta Ria (The Temple of Love)** ✭ MALAYSIAN Cockle Bay's star attraction for those who appreciate good food and fun ambience without paying a fortune, Chinta Ria is on the roof of the three-story development. In a round building dominated by a giant golden Buddha in the center, Chinta Ria serves fairly good "hawker-style" (read: cheap and delicious) Malaysian food. While the food is good, the atmosphere is even more memorable. The service is slow, but who cares in such an interesting space, with plenty of nooks, crannies, and society folk to look at. There are seats outside (some within range of the noise of the highway), but the best views unfold inside. Hot-and-sour soup—with tofu, mushrooms, bamboo shoots, and preserved cabbage—makes an interesting starter, and I recommend chile prawns and *hokkeien char* (soft-cooked egg noodles with extras) as main dishes.

Cockle Bay Wharf Complex. ✆ **02/9264 3211.** Main courses A$11–A$28 (US$8.80–US$22). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily noon–2:30pm and 6–11pm. Ferry or monorail: Darling Harbour.

**Zaaffran** ✭✭ CONTEMPORARY INDIAN Sydney certainly hasn't seen an Indian restaurant like this one before. Forget the dark interiors and Indian murals. Here you find white surfaces, a glass-fronted wine cellar, and magnificent views of the water and the Sydney skyline from the far side of Darling Harbour. (An outdoor terrace provides the best views.) The restaurant started when two brothers from Bombay joined forces with chef Vikrant Kapoor, formerly the *chef de cuisine* at Raffles in Singapore. Together, they've revolutionized classic Indian cuisine. Expect such delights as

### Moments Something Fishy

If you like fresh seafood at cheap prices, then saunter down to the **Sydney Fishmarket** ★, on the corner of Bank Street and Pyrmont Bridge Road, Pyrmont (✆ **02/9660 1611**). The major retailers here sell sashimi at the cheapest prices in Sydney. If you prefer your seafood cooked, then stay for lunch at one of the eateries scattered along the boardwalk and inside the main building. You can also call the **Fishline** (✆ **02/9552 2180**) for information on special events such as seafood cooking classes.

To get to the Fishmarket, take the light rail (tram) from Central Station, Chinatown, or Darling Harbour to the Fishmarket stop, or walk from Darling Harbour. (Follow the signs.)

chicken breast morsels in yogurt-onion sauce with mustard seeds, curry leaf, and mountain chiles; or scallops, calamari, and tiger prawns in a ragout of puréed onions, tomato, and green coconut cream infused with Kashmiri chile, green cardamom, and cloves. Even fans of traditional Indian food are impressed by the creations here. It's a world away from almost anything you'd find on the subcontinent.

Level 2, 345 Harbourside Shopping Centre, Darling Harbour. ✆ **02/9211 8900.** Reservations recommended. Main courses A$20–A$25 (US$16–US$20). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily noon–2:30pm and 6–11pm. Ferry or monorail: Darling Harbour.

## KINGS CROSS/DARLINGHURST

**Bourbon & Beefsteak Bar** INTERNATIONAL Extensively renovated in 2003, Bourbon & Beefsteak has been a Kings Cross institution for more than 30 years. It still attracts everyone from visiting U.S. sailors and tourists to businesspeople and ravers. The fact that it's open 24 hours means many people never seem to leave—occasionally you'll find someone taking a nap in the bathroom. The American-themed restaurant is always busy, churning out steaks, seafood, salads, Tex-Mex dishes, ribs, and pasta, under the supervision of award-winning chef Colin Holt.

24 Darlinghurst Rd., Kings Cross. ✆ **02/9358 1144.** Reservations recommended Fri–Sun. Main courses A$13–A$28 (US$10–US$22). A$2 (US$1.60) surcharge weekends and public holidays. AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 24 hr. (breakfast 6–11am; happy hour 4–7pm). CityRail: Kings Cross.

**Govindas** VEGETARIAN When I think of Govindas, I can't help smiling. Perhaps it's because I'm recalling the happy vibe from the Hare Krishna center it's based in, or maybe it's because the food is so cheap! Or maybe it's because they even throw in a decent movie with the meal. (The movie theater is on a different floor.) The food is simple vegetarian, served buffet style and eaten in a basic room off black-lacquer tables. Typical dishes include pastas and salads, lentil dishes, soups, and casseroles. It's BYO and doctrine-free.

112 Darlinghurst Rd., Darlinghurst. ✆ **02/9380 5155.** Dinner A$16 (US$13), including movie. AE, MC, V. Daily 6–11pm. CityRail: Kings Cross.

**Hard Rock Cafe** AMERICAN The obligatory half-Cadillac through the wall beckons you into this shrine to rock 'n' roll. Among the items on display are costumes worn by Elvis, John Lennon, and Elton John, as well as guitars from Sting and the Bee Gees, drums from Phil Collins and the Beatles, and one of Madonna's bras. The mainstays here are the

burgers, with ribs, chicken, fish, salads, and T-bone steaks on the menu, too. Most meals come with french fries or baked potatoes and a salad. It's really busy on Friday and Saturday evenings from around 7:30 to 10:30pm, when you might have to line up to get a seat.

121–129 Crown St., Darlinghurst. ✆ **02/9331 1116.** Reservations not accepted. Main courses A$9.95–A$22 (US$7.95–US$18). 10% surcharge weekends and public holidays. AE, DC, MC, V. Daily noon–midnight. Shop daily 10am–midnight. Closed Dec 25. CityRail: Museum; then walk across Hyde Park, head down the hill past the Australian Museum on William St., and turn right onto Crown St. Sydney Explorer Bus: Stop no. 7.

## CAFE CULTURE

Debate rages over which cafe serves the best coffee in Sydney, which has the best atmosphere, and which has the tastiest snacks. The main cafe scenes center on **Victoria Street** in Darlinghurst, **Stanley Street** in East Sydney, and **King Street** in Newtown. Other places, including Balmoral Beach on the North Shore, Bondi Beach, and Paddington, all have their own favored hangouts.

***Note:*** Americans will be sorry to learn that, unlike in the States, free refills of coffee are rare in Australian restaurants and cafes. Sip slowly. Expect a cup of coffee to cost A$2.50 to A$3 (US$2–US$2.40); main courses run A$8 to A$15 (US$6.40–US$12).

This section includes my favorite cafes around town.

**Balmoral Boatshed Kiosk** ★ *Finds* This beautiful rustic cafe is right on the water beside the dinghies and sailing craft of the wooden Balmoral Boatshed (located to the far right of the central beach as you look at the water). It's a heavenly place for enjoying a breakfast muffin or a ham-and-cheese croissant while basking in the sun. This place is popular with families on weekend mornings, so if you hate kids, find somewhere else. (The nearby Sandbar has the best takeout food and coffee.)

2 The Esplanade, Balmoral Beach. ✆ **02/9968 4412.** No credit cards. Summer daily 8am–6pm; winter daily 8am–5pm. Ferry to Taronga Zoo, then bus to Balmoral Beach.

**Bar Coluzzi** Although it may no longer offer the best coffee in Sydney, this cafe's claim to fame is that long ago it served real espresso when the rest of the city was drinking Nescafé. People-watching is a favorite hobby at this fashionably worn-around-the edges spot in the heart of Sydney's cafe district.

322 Victoria St., Darlinghurst. ✆ **02/9380 5420.** AE, MC, V. Daily 5am–8pm. CityRail: Kings Cross.

**Hernandez** ★ *Finds* The walls of this tiny, cluttered cafe are crammed with eccentric fake masterpieces, and the aroma of 20 types of coffee roasted and ground on the premises permeates the air. It's almost a religious experience for discerning inner-city coffee addicts. The Spanish espresso is a treat.

60 Kings Cross Rd., Potts Point. ✆ **02/9331 2343.** No credit cards. Daily 24 hr. CityRail: Kings Cross.

**The Old Coffee Shop** ★ Sydney's oldest coffee shop opened in the Victorian Strand Arcade in 1891. The shop may or may not serve Sydney's best java, but the old-world feel of the place and the sugary snacks, cakes, and pastries make up for it. It's a good spot to take a break from shopping and sightseeing.

Ground floor, Strand Arcade. ✆ **02/9231 3002.** AE, MC, V. Mon–Fri 7:30am–5pm; Sat 8:30am–5pm; Sun 10:30am–4pm. CityRail: Town Hall.

## IN NEWTOWN: GREAT ETHNIC EATS

Inner-city Newtown is three stops from Central Station on CityRail and 10 minutes by bus from central Sydney. On Newtown's main drag, **King Street,** many inexpensive restaurants offer food from all over the world.

**Le Kilimanjaro** AFRICAN With so many excellent restaurants in Newtown— if they're bad, they close down or improve quickly—I picked Kilimanjaro because it's the most unusual. It's a tiny place, with limited seating on two floors. Basically, you enter, you choose a dish off the blackboard menu (while standing), and a waiter escorts you to your seat. On a recent visit I had couscous, African bread (similar to Indian chapati), and *saussou-gor di guan* (tuna in a rich sauce). Another favorite dish is *yassa* (chicken in a rich sauce). All meals are served on traditional wooden plates.

280 King St., Newtown. ✆ **02/9557 4565.** Reservations not accepted. Main courses A$8.50–A$9.50 (US$6.80–US$7.60). No credit cards. CityRail: Newtown.

**Old Saigon** *Value* VIETNAMESE I highly recommend this place for a cheap night out. Bursting with atmosphere, Old Saigon was owned until 1998 by a former American Vietnam War correspondent who loved Vietnam so much he ended up living there and marrying a local before coming to Australia. Just to make sure you knew his history, he put up his photos on the walls and scattered homemade tin helicopters around the place. His Vietnamese brother-in-law has taken over, but the food is still glorious; the spicy squid dishes are among my favorites. A popular pastime is grilling your own strips of venison, beef, wild boar, kangaroo, or crocodile over a burner at your table, then wrapping the meat in rice paper with lettuce and mint, and dipping it in chile sauce. BYO.

107 King St., Newtown. ✆ **02/9519 5931.** Reservations recommended. Main courses A$12–A$43 (US$9.60–US$34); most dishes around A$18 (US$14). AE, DC, MC, V. Wed–Fri noon–3pm; Tues–Sun 6–11pm. CityRail: Newtown.

## BONDI BEACH

**Pompei's** ★★ *Finds* PIZZA/PASTA/ICE CREAM The recipe is simple: Use good ingredients and you'll get good pizzas—regulars swear they are the best in Sydney. Toppings include figs, prosciutto, fresh goat cheese, and pumpkin. Pompei's also has a selection of pizzas without cheese. And leave some room for the homemade gelati, the best in Sydney by far. The last time I had anything so good was recently in Pompeii, Italy, itself, and I swore then it was the best I'd ever eaten. Try dense raspberry, thick chocolate, tiramisu, or *lemoncello.* The water views and outside tables are another plus.

126–130 Roscoe St., at Gould St., Bondi Beach. ✆ **02/9365 1233.** Reservations recommended. Pizza A$13–A$17 (US$10–US$14). AE, DC, MC, V. Tues–Sun 11am–11pm.

**Thai Terrific** ★ THAI Thai Terrific by name, terrific Thai by nature. This superb place around the corner from the Bondi Hotel is run with flair and efficient service. The large back room can be noisy, so if you prefer less din with your dinner, sit at one of the sidewalk tables. The servings are enormous—three people could fill up on just two main courses. The *tom yum* (hot and sour) soups and spicy prawn or seafood *laksa* noodle soups (made with coconut milk) are the best I've tasted in Australia and very filling. I also highly recommend the red curries.

Equally nice (and quieter) is the Bangkok-style **Nina's Ploy Thai Restaurant** ★, 132 Wairoa Ave. (✆ **02/9365 1118**), at the corner of Warners Avenue at the end of the main Campbell Parade strip. Main courses here cost A$8 to A$13 (US$6.40–US$10); cash only.

147 Curlewis St., Bondi Beach. ✆ **02/9365 7794.** Reservations recommended Fri–Sat night. Main courses A$11–A$20 (US$8.80–US$16). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily noon–11pm. Bus: 380 to Bondi Beach.

## WORTH A SPLURGE

**Bondi Icebergs—Icebergs Dining Room & Bar** ★★★ SEAFOOD/MEDITERRANEAN This revamped old swimming club complex overlooking Bondi Beach is a truly fabulous place to hang out. From its corner position on the cliffs, the Icebergs Bar looks directly across the beach and water, and its floor-to-roof windows make sure you get to experience what's probably the best view in Sydney. The bar features lots of cushions and even hammocks, and the views stretch on across the balcony and into the restaurant. Inside this highly recommended eating place, it's all frosted glass dividers (to match the color of the ocean), and crisp white tablecloths and napkins (to resemble the surf). Not surprisingly, seafood features highly on the menu. You may well find wild scallops, risotto with coral trout and oregano, a fish stew from Livorno, and spaghetti with clams.

Here, too, is the Sundeck Café, which boasts a variety of light snacks and meals ranging from focaccia, salads, and burgers to fresh local seafood and pasta, all served out on a terrace with fantastic views.

1 Notts Ave., Bondi Beach. ✆ **02/9365 9000.** Reservations essential. Main courses A$36–A$44 (US$29–US$35). AE, MC, V. Tues–Sat noon–3pm and 6.30–10:30pm; Sun noon–3pm and 6:30–9pm. Bus: 380 to Bondi Beach.

## MANLY

Manly is 30 minutes from Circular Quay by ferry, or 15 minutes by JetCat. The takeout shops that line **the Corso,** as well as the **pedestrian mall** that runs between the ferry terminal and the main Manly Beach, offer everything from Turkish kabobs to Japanese noodles.

**Ashiana** ★ INDIAN You'll be hard pressed to find a better cheap Indian restaurant in the Sydney area. Tucked away up a staircase next to the Steyne Hotel (just off the Corso and near the main beach), Ashiana has won prizes for its traditional spicy cooking. But it's not gourmet food, just plain, creamy, and simple stuff. I've eaten there for years. Portions are large and filling, and the service is very friendly. The butter chicken is magnificent, while *malai kofta* (cheese and potato dumplings in mild, creamy sauce) is the best this side of Bombay. Beer is the best drink with everything. Work off the heavy load in your stomach with a beachside stroll afterward.

Corner of Sydney Rd. and the Corso, Manly. ✆ **02/9977 3466.** Reservations recommended. Main courses A$8.50–A$18 (US$6.80–US$14). AE, MC, V. Daily 5:30–11pm. Ferry or JetCat: Manly.

**Green's Eatery** VEGETARIAN Of the many eateries in Manly, this little vegetarian place, just off the Corso on the turnoff before the Steyne Hotel, does the best lunchtime business. The food is healthy and good quality. The menu includes 11 vegetarian burgers, curries and noodle dishes, patties and salads, soups, smoothies, and wraps. Green's serves some exceptionally nice cakes, too, which despite being incredibly wholesome are surprisingly tasty. On a nice day you can sit outside.

### *Finds* Sydney's Best Fries

If you're looking for the best french fries in Sydney, head to **Manly Ocean Foods,** three shops down from the beach on the Corso. Avoid the fish and chips here (the shark is not the best, in my opinion), and spend a few dollars extra on barramundi, salmon, perch, or snapper.

1–3 Sydney Rd., Manly. ✆ **02/9977 1904.** Menu items A$1.20–A$7.40 (US95¢–US$5.90). No credit cards. Daily 8am–7pm. Ferry or JetCat: Manly.

## 5 What to See & Do in Sydney

The only problem with visiting Sydney is fitting in everything you want to do and see. Of course, you won't want to miss the iconic attractions: the **Opera House** and the **Harbour Bridge.** Everyone seems to be climbing over the arch of the bridge these days on the Bridge Climb Tour, so look up for the tiny dots of people waving to the ferry passengers below.

You should also check out the native wildlife in **Taronga Zoo** and the **Sydney Aquarium,** stroll around the tourist precinct of **Darling Harbour,** and get a dose of Down Under culture at the not-too-large **Australian Museum.** Also try to take time out to visit one of the nearby national parks for a taste of the Australian bush. If it's hot, take your "cozzie" (swimsuit) and towel to **Bondi Beach** or **Manly.**

I also recommend a quick trip out of town. Go bushwalking in the **Blue Mountains,** wine tasting in the **Hunter Valley,** or dolphin spotting at **Port Stephens** (see chapter 5 for details on all three).

Whatever you decide to do, you won't have enough time. Don't be surprised if you start planning your next visit before your first is even finished.

### THE OPERA HOUSE & SYDNEY HARBOUR

Officially called Port Jackson, **Sydney Harbour** is the focal point of Sydney and one of the features—along with the beaches and easy access to surrounding national parks—that makes this city so special. It's entered through **the Heads,** two bush-topped outcrops (you'll see them if you take a ferry or JetCat to Manly), beyond which the harbor laps at some 240km (149 miles) of shoreline before stretching out into the Parramatta River. Visitors are often awestruck by the harbor's beauty, especially at night, when the sails of the Opera House and the girders of the Harbour Bridge are lit up, and the waters are swirling with the reflection of lights from the abutting high-rises—reds, greens, blues, yellows, and oranges. During the day, it buzzes with green-and-yellow ferries pulling in and out of busy Circular Quay, sleek tourist craft, fully rigged tall ships, giant container vessels making their way to and from the wharves of Darling Harbour, and hundreds of white-sailed yachts.

The greenery along the harbor's edges is a surprising feature, thanks to the **Sydney Harbour National Park,** a haven for native trees and plants, and a feeding and breeding ground for lorikeets and other nectar-eating bird life. In the center of the harbor is a series of islands; the most impressive is the tiny isle supporting **Fort Denison,** which once housed convicts and acted as part of the city's defense.

**THE HARBOUR ON THE CHEAP** The best way to see Sydney Harbour is from the water. Several companies operate tourist craft (see "Harbor Cruises & Organized Tours," later in this chapter), but it's easy enough just to hop on a regular passenger ferry (see "Getting Around," earlier in this chapter). The best ferry excursions are over the beachside suburb of **Manly** (come back after dusk to see the lights ablaze around The Rocks and Circular Quay); to **Watsons Bay,** where you can have lunch and wander along the cliffs; to **Darling Harbour,** for all the area's entertainment and the fact that you travel right under the Harbour Bridge; and to **Mosman Bay,** just for the ride and to see the grand houses that overlook exclusive harbor inlets.

## Value Great Deals on Sightseeing

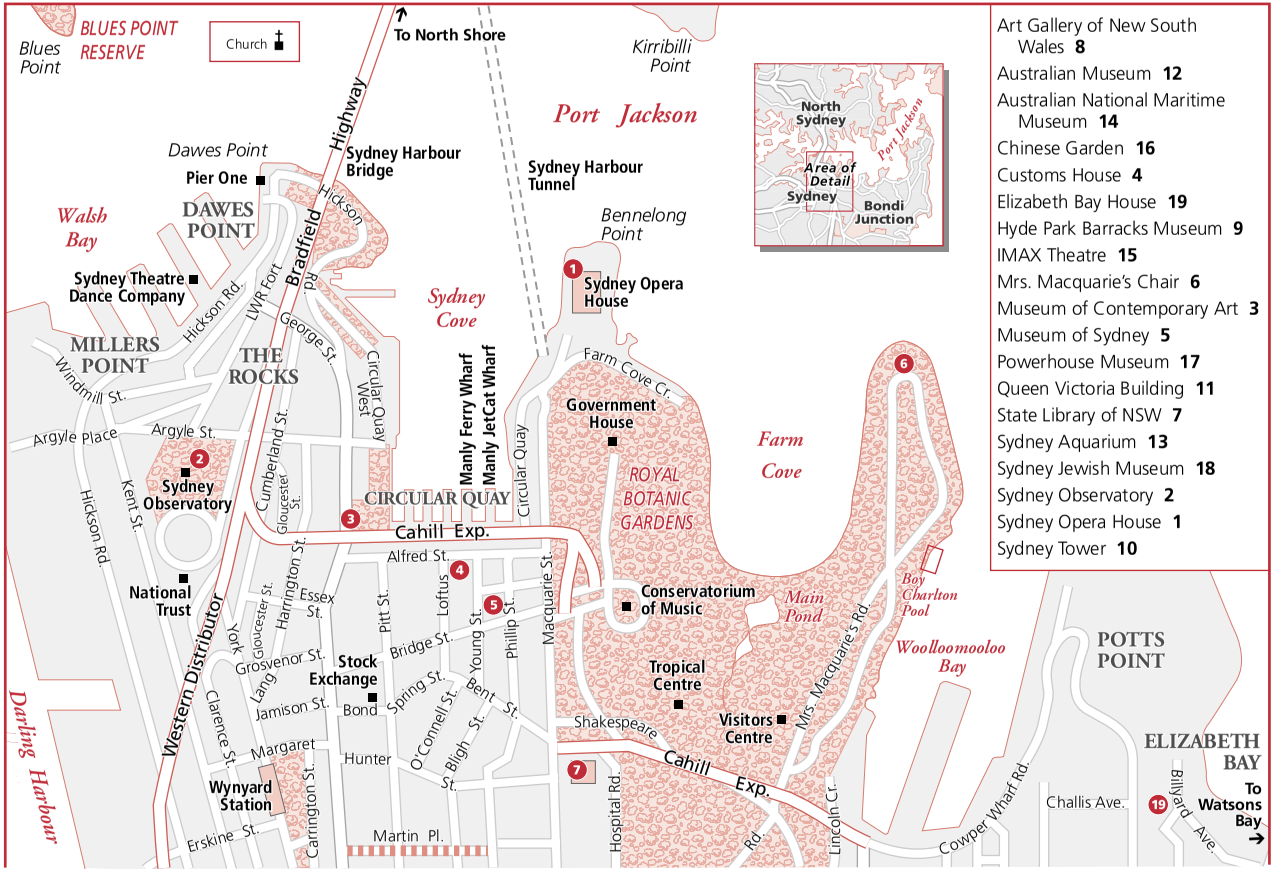
The **Privileges Card** (✆ **02/6161 1999;** www.privilegescard.com) is a great way to save money if you plan to visit Sydney's biggest attractions. The card costs A$35 (US$28), is good for up to 1 month, and can be used in Sydney, Canberra, and Melbourne. In Sydney, all the major attractions offer some sort of discount, like two-for-one admission or reduced-price if you're traveling alone, and buy-one-get-one-free deals. When you show the card you'll also get discounts (typically 20%) on harbor cruises and at certain restaurants (sometimes a free main course if two of you are dining, or a 20% rebate off the total bill for the cardholder and three others). To get a card, fill out an application, available on the Internet and at tourist information centers in Sydney; you'll receive a booklet with details on where you can save. If you book in advance, the company can arrange to have the card sent to your hotel.

The **See Sydney & Beyond** card (✆ **02/9247 6611;** www.seesydneycard.com), a cashless smart card packaging more than 40 of the city's main attractions and tours, is valuable for avoiding lines and saving money, although you'll have to plan well to get the most out of it. The card can be purchased for a 1-, 2-, 3-, or 7-day period; the 1-day pass costs A$65 (US$52) for adults and A$45 (US$36) for children. You can also purchase cards including public transportation; a 1-day card with this option costs A$80 (US$64) for adults and A$53 (US$42) for children.

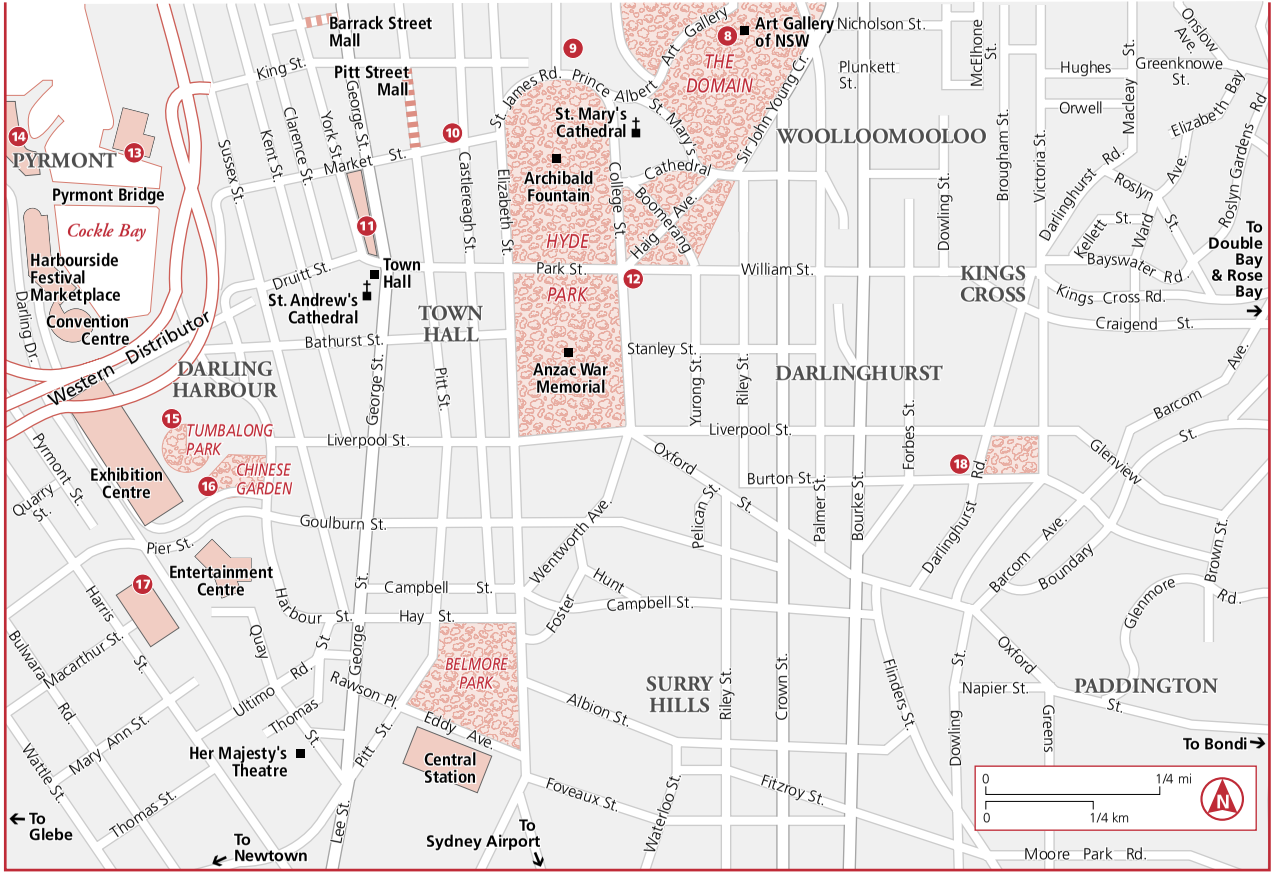
**FAST ACTION ON THE HARBOUR** For a thrill ride, you can board a 420-horsepower jet boat, which zooms about on three high-velocity waterway tours at speeds of up to 40 knots (about 80kmph/50 mph), with huge 240-degree turns and instant stops. **Harbour Jet** (✆ **1300/887 373** in Australia, or 02/9212 3555; www.harbourjet.com) offers a 35-minute Jet Blast Adventure costing A$60 (US$48) for adults, A$40 (US$32) for kids under 15, and A$180 (US$144) for families. A 50-minute Sydney Harbour Adventure costs A$75 (US$60) for adults, A$50 (US$40) for kids under 15, and A$225 (US$180) for families; an 80-minute Middle Harbour Adventure cruise costs A$95 (US$76) for adults, A$65 (US$52) for kids under 15, and A$288 (US$230) for families. Rides are fast and furious and pump with rock music. The boat leaves from the Convention Jetty, between the Convention Centre and the Harbourside Shopping complex on the far side of Darling Harbour. These trips don't operate every day, so check beforehand.

Another option is **Oz Jet Boat** (✆ **02/9808 3700;** www.ozjetboating.com), which departs every hour from the Eastern Pontoon at Circular Quay (on the walkway to the Opera House). These large red boats are a bit more powerful than the blue Harbour Jet ones, but you might not notice the difference. This company offers a 30-minute ride for A$50 (US$40) for adults, A$35 (US$28) for kids, and A$150 (US$120) for families; and a 1-hour trip out to Sydney Heads on weekends for A$90 (US$72) for adults, A$60 (US$48) for children, and A$270 (US$216) for families.

# Central Sydney Attractions




Art Gallery of New South Wales **8**
Australian Museum **12**
Australian National Maritime Museum **14**
Chinese Garden **16**
Customs House **4**
Elizabeth Bay House **19**
Hyde Park Barracks Museum **9**
IMAX Theatre **15**
Mrs. Macquarie's Chair **6**
Museum of Contemporary Art **3**
Museum of Sydney **5**
Powerhouse Museum **17**
Queen Victoria Building **11**
State Library of NSW **7**
Sydney Aquarium **13**
Sydney Jewish Museum **18**
Sydney Observatory **2**
Sydney Opera House **1**
Sydney Tower **10**


Barrack Street Mall
Pitt Street Mall
King St.
George St.
York St.
Market St.
Sussex St.
Kent St.
Clarence St.
PYRMONT
Pyrmont Bridge
Cockle Bay
Harbourside Festival Marketplace
Convention Centre
Darling Dr.
Western Distributor
DARLING HARBOUR
TUMBALONG PARK
CHINESE GARDEN
Exhibition Centre
Pyrmont St.
Quarry St.
Pier St.
Entertainment Centre
Harris St.
Bulwara Rd.
Macarthur St.
Ann St.
Mary St.
Wattle St.
Thomas St.
Ultimo Rd.
Harbour St.
Quay St.
George St.
Rawson Pl.
Thomas St.
Her Majesty's Theatre
To Glebe
To Newtown
Goulburn St.
Liverpool St.
Hay St.
Campbell St.
Druitt St.
Bathurst St.
Town Hall
St. Andrew's Cathedral
TOWN HALL
Castlereagh St.
Elizabeth St.
Pitt St.
Lee St.
St. James Rd.
Prince Albert Rd.
St. Mary's Cathedral
Archibald Fountain
College St.
HYDE PARK
Park St.
Anzac War Memorial
Stanley St.
Art Gallery Rd.
Art Gallery of NSW
THE DOMAIN
Sir John Young Cr.
Cathedral St.
Boomerang St.
Haig Ave.
BELMORE PARK
Eddy Ave.
Central Station
To Sydney Airport
Foveaux St.
Albion St.
Waterloo St.
SURRY HILLS
Riley St.
Crown St.
Flinders St.
Fitzroy St.
Nicholson St.
Plunkett St.
WOOLLOOMOOLOO
Dowling St.
Broughams St.
McElhone St.
Victoria St.
Hughes St.
Orwell St.
Macleay St.
Greenknowe St.
Onslow Ave.
Elizabeth Bay Rd.
Roslyn Gardens
Darlinghurst Rd.
Roslyn Ave.
Kellett St.
Ward St.
Bayswater Rd.
Kings Cross Rd.
KINGS CROSS
Craigend St.
To Double Bay & Rose Bay
DARLINGHURST
Yurong St.
Riley St.
Liverpool St.
Forbes St.
Barcom Ave.
Glenview St.
Burton St.
Oxford St.
Pelican St.
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Barcom Ave.
Boundary St.
Brown St.
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**Luna Park** *Kids* The huge smiling clown face and the fairground attractions, which are easily visible from Circular Quay, make up one of Australia's iconic attractions. Opened in 1935 and closed for many years since, it reopened in 2004. It's small but fun, with traditional theme-park amusements rather than high-tech rides. It has a carousel, dodge-'em cars, a Ferris wheel, and the like. Several rides are suitable for small children, too. You buy tickets—or "lunas," as they're called—at booths inside the park.

1 Olympic Dr., Milsons Point (across the harbor from the Sydney Opera House). ✆ **02/9922 6644.** www.lunaparksydney.com. Free admission. Rides A$3–A$5 (US$2.40–US$4); family day pass with unlimited rides A$95 (US$76). Sun–Thurs 11am–7:30pm; Fri–Sat 10am–midnight. Ferry or CityRail: Milsons Point.

**Sydney Harbour Bridge** ★★★ *Moments* One thing few tourists do, although it only takes an hour or so, is to walk across the Harbour Bridge. The bridge, completed in 1932, is 1,150m (3,772 ft.) long and spans 503m (1,650 ft.) from the south shore to the north. It accommodates pedestrian walkways, two railway lines, and an eight-lane road. The 30-minute stroll from one end to the other offers excellent harbor views. From the other side, you can take a CityRail train from Milsons Point back to the city (to Wynyard—change there for Circular Quay, Town Hall, or Central).

As you walk across, stop off at the **Pylon Lookout** (✆ **02/9247 3408**), at the southeastern pylon. Admission is A$8.50 (US$6.80) for adults, A$3 (US$2.40) for children over 7. From the top of this bridge support, 89m (292 ft.) above the water, you get panoramic views of Sydney Harbour, the ferry terminals of Circular Quay, and beyond. An interesting museum charts the building of the bridge. The Pylon Lookout is open daily from 10am to 5pm (closed Dec 25). Reach the pylon by walking to the far end of George Street in The Rocks toward the Harbour Bridge. Just past The Mercantile Pub, you'll see some stone steps that take you onto Cumberland Street. From there, it's a 2-minute walk to the steps underneath the bridge on your right. Climb four flights of stairs to reach the bridge's Western Footway and then walk along to the first pylon. ***Note:*** Climbing up inside the pylon involves 200 steps.

### *Moments* Climbing the Harbour Bridge

At one time, only bridge workers had the opportunity to see Sydney from the top of the main bridge arch. But since October 1998, Sydneysiders and tourists have been able to experience the spectacular view and the exhilarating achievement of climbing to the top of one of Australia's icons. It takes 3 hours from check-in at the **BridgeClimb** ★★ base, 5 Cumberland St., The Rocks (✆ **02/9240 1100** or 02/8274 7777; fax 02/9240 1122; www.bridgeclimb.com) to completion. The office is open daily from 8am to 6pm, and climbers leave in small groups every 10 minutes or so. Climbers wear "Bridge Suits" and are harnessed to a line. Participants are also breath-tested for alcohol and are banned from carrying anything, including cameras. Climbs cost A$160 (US$128) for adults and A$100 (US$80) for children 12 to 16 on Monday through Thursday; and A$185 (US$148) for adults and A$125 (US$100) for children 12 to 16 for climbs Friday through Sunday. Daily Twilight climbs cost A$225 (US$180) for adults and A$175 (US$140) for kids 12 to 16. Children under 12 are not allowed to climb.

**Sydney Opera House** ★★★ Only a handful of buildings around the world are as architecturally and culturally significant as the Sydney Opera House. But what sets it apart from, say, the Taj Mahal and the Great Pyramids of Egypt is that this white-sailed construction caught mid-billow over the waters of Sydney Cove is a working building. Most visitors are surprised to learn it's not just an opera house, but also a full-scale performing-arts complex with five major performance spaces. The biggest and grandest is the 2,690-seat **Concert Hall,** which has the best acoustics of any building of its type in the world. Come here to experience opera, chamber music, symphonies, dance, choral performances, and even rock 'n' roll. The **Opera Theatre** is smaller, seating 1,547, and books operas, ballets, and dance. The **Drama Theatre,** seating 544, and the **Playhouse,** seating 398, specialize in plays and smaller-scale performances. The **Boardwalk,** seating 300, is used for dance and experimental music.

The history of the building is as intriguing as the design. The New South Wales Government raised the construction money with a lottery. Danish architect Jørn Utzon won an international competition to design it. From the start, the project was controversial, with many Sydneysiders believing it was a monstrosity. Following a disagreement, Utzon returned home without ever seeing his finished project. The interior fell victim to a compromise design, which, among other things, left too little space to perform full-scale operas. And the cost? Initially the project was budgeted at a cool A$7 million (US$5.6 million), but by the time it was finished in 1973 it had cost a staggering A$102 million (US$82 million), most raised through a series of lotteries. Since then, continual refurbishment and the major task of replacing the asbestos-laden grouting between the hundreds of thousands of white tiles that make up its shell has cost many millions more.

But now that long overdue reconstruction is in progress, aimed at putting into practice what Jørn Utzon has long visualized. The tatty old reception hall has already been transformed into an impressive welcome room. Its centerpiece is Utzon's first foray into visual art: a glorious floor-to-ceiling tapestry inspired by Bach's Hamburg Symphonies and Raphael's painting, *Procession to Calvary.*

Preliminary work has also started on the Western Loggia, or colonnade, which will open up the foyers of The Playhouse, Drama Theatre, and The Studio to harbor views and create spaces for cafes and functions. Eventually, all three western foyers will be combined into one, and their box offices and bars will be centralized, too. Investigations are also going ahead into refurbishing the Opera Theatre and improving the acoustics in the Concert Hall.

**Guided tours** of the Opera House last about an hour and are held daily from 9am to 5pm, except Good Friday and December 25. Though guides try to take groups into the main theaters and around the foyers, if you don't get to see everything you want, it's because the Opera House is not a museum but a workplace. There's almost always some performance, practice, or setting up to be done. Reservations are essential. Tour sizes are limited, so be prepared to wait. Tours include approximately 200 stairs. (Tours for people with disabilities can be arranged.) Specialized tours, focusing on the building's architecture and engineering, for example, can also be arranged.

The Tourism Services Department at the Sydney Opera House can book **combination packages,** including dinner and a show; and a tour, dinner, and a show. Prices vary depending on shows and dining venues. Visitors from overseas can buy tickets by credit card and pick them up at the box office on arrival or contact a local tour company specializing in Australia. Advance ticket purchases are a good idea, because performances

are very popular. The views from the back rows are hardly worth the effort and expense if you turn up on the day of performance. Tickets for performances vary from as little as A$12 (US$9.60) for children's shows to A$180 (US$144) for good seats at the opera. Plays average A$40 to A$60 (US$32–US$48).

**Free performances** take place outside on the Opera House boardwalks on Sunday afternoons and during festival times. The artists range from musicians and performance artists to school groups.

Bennelong Point. ✆ **02/9250 7250** for guided tours and inquiries, or 02/9250 7777 box office. Fax 02/9251 3943. www.sydneyoperahouse.com. Box office Mon–Sat 9am–8:30pm; Sun 2 hr. before performance. Tours A$23 (US$18). Given daily 9am–5pm (every 30 min.), subject to theater availability. Backstage Tours A$140 (US$112). Start daily at 7am, for 2 hr., with breakfast. CityRail, bus, or ferry: Circular Quay. Sydney Explorer bus. Parking: Daytime A$7 (US$5.60) per hour; evening A$23 (US$18) flat rate.

## ATTRACTIONS AT DARLING HARBOUR

Many tourists head to Darling Harbour for the Harbourside Festival Marketplace, a huge structure beside the Pyrmont pedestrian and monorail bridge that's crammed full of cheap eateries and a few interesting shops. However, Sydney's tourist precinct has a lot more to offer.

**Australian National Maritime Museum** Modern Australia owes almost everything to the sea, so it's not surprising that there's a museum dedicated to ships, from Aboriginal vessels to submarines. You'll find ships' logs, things to pull and tug at, and the fastest boat in the world, the *Spirit of Australia.* Docked in the harbor are several ships and launches, including an Australian Navy destroyer, the *Vampire,* and an Oberon Class submarine. You can clamber over many of them. Allow 2 hours.

Darling Harbour. ✆ **02/9298 3777.** www.anmm.gov.au. Free admission to main exhibition. Admission to all ships A$18 (US$14) adults, A$9 (US$7.20) children 5–15, A$35 (US$28) families. Navy Package (includes museum, *Vampire,* and submarine *Onslow*) A$10 (US$8) adults, A$6 (US$4.80) children 5–15, A$25 (US$20) families. Admission to single vessels available. Daily 9:30am–5pm (until 6:30pm in Jan). Ferry: Darling Harbour. Monorail: Harbourside. Sydney Explorer bus.

**Chinese Garden** The largest Chinese garden of its type outside China offers a pleasant escape from the city concrete. Expert gardeners from China's Guangdong Province designed the garden according to principles of garden design dating to the 5th century. Allow 30 minutes.

Darling Harbour (adjacent to the Entertainment Centre). ✆ **02/9281 6863.** Admission A$6 (US$4.80) adults, A$3 (US$2.40) children, A$15 (US$12) families. Daily 9:30am–dusk. Ferry: Darling Harbour. Monorail: Convention. Sydney Explorer bus.

**IMAX Theatre Sydney** Four different IMAX films are usually showing on the gigantic eight-story-high screen. Each flick lasts about 50 minutes or so. If you've ever been to an IMAX theater before, you know what to expect. As you watch, your mind is tricked into feeling that you're right in the heart of the action. Also shown are 3-D movies, which cost A$1 (US80¢) extra.

Southern Promenade, Darling Harbour. ✆ **02/9281 3300.** Admission A$16 (US$13) adults, A$11 (US$8.80) children 3–15, A$45 (US$36) families. Sun–Thurs 10am–10pm; Fri–Sat 10am–11:30pm. Ferry: Darling Harbour. Monorail: Convention. Sydney Explorer bus.

**Powerhouse Museum** Sydney's most interactive museum is also one of the largest in the Southern Hemisphere. In the postmodern industrial interior you'll find all sorts of displays and gadgets relating to the sciences, transportation, human achievement, decorative art, and social history. The many hands-on exhibits make this fascinating museum worthy of a couple of hours of your time.

500 Harris St., Ultimo (near Darling Harbour). ✆ **02/9217 0111.** www.phm.gov.au. Admission A$10 (US$8) adults, A$5 (US$4) students and children 5–15, A$24 (US$19) families. Free admission 1st Sat of every month. Daily 10am–5pm. Ferry: Darling Harbour. Monorail: Harbourside. Sydney Explorer bus.

**Sydney Aquarium** This is one of the world's best aquariums and should be near the top of any Sydney itinerary. The main attractions are the underwater walkways through two enormous tanks—one full of giant rays and gray nurse sharks and the other where you can see the seals in action (nearby building work throughout 2005 and possibly into 2006 may mean the seals won't be on display). Other exhibits include a Plexiglas room suspended inside a pool patrolled by rescued seals and a magnificent section on the Great Barrier Reef, where thousands of colorful fish school around coral outcrops. Also on display are two saltwater crocodiles and some fairy penguins. Try to visit during the week, when it's less crowded. Allow around 2 hours.

Aquarium Pier, Darling Harbour. ✆ **02/9262 2300.** www.sydneyaquarium.com.au. Admission A$24 (US$19) adults, A$12 (US$9.60) children 3–15, A$56 (US$45) families. Daily 9am–10pm. Seal Sanctuary closes at 7pm in summer. CityRail: Town Hall. Ferry: Darling Harbour. Sydney Explorer bus.

## OTHER TOP ATTRACTIONS: A SPECTACULAR VIEW, SYDNEY'S CONVICT HISTORY & MORE

**Hyde Park Barracks Museum** These Georgian-style barracks were designed in 1819 by the convict and architect Francis Greenway. They were built by convicts and inhabited by fellow prisoners. These days they house relics from those early days in interesting, modern displays, including log books, early settlement artifacts, and a room full of ships' hammocks in which visitors can lie and listen to fragments of prisoner conversation. If you are interested in Sydney's early beginnings, I highly recommend a visit. The displays are far more straightforward that those at the Museum of Sydney (see listing later in this chapter). The courtyard cafe is excellent. Allow 1 hour or more.

Queens Sq., Macquarie St. ✆ **02/9223 8922.** Admission A$7 (US$5.60) adults, A$3 (US$2.40) children, A$17 (US$14) families. Daily 9:30am–5pm. CityRail: St. James or Martin Place. Sydney Explorer bus.

**Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA)** This imposing sandstone museum set back from the water on The Rocks side of Circular Quay offers wacky, entertaining, inspiring, and befuddling displays of what's new (and dated) in modern art. It houses the J. W. Power Collection of more than 4,000 pieces, including works by Andy Warhol, Christo, Marcel Duchamp, and Robert Rauschenberg, as well as temporary exhibits. It's relatively new and still building up its collection, so this museum isn't as impressive as major modern art museums in, say, London or New York. Still, it's worth at least 1 hour.

140 George St., Circular Quay W. ✆ **02/9252 4033.** www.mca.com.au. Free general admission. Daily 10am–6pm (5pm in winter). CityRail, bus, or ferry: Circular Quay. Sydney Explorer bus.

**Sydney Olympic Park** ★ The site of the 2000 Olympic Games is still very much a tourist attraction as well as a major sporting venue. Most of the Olympic venues are at this dedicated Olympic precinct at Homebush Bay, which also has plenty of bars and restaurants. Start at the **Homebush Bay Information Centre,** which has displays, walking maps, and tour tips. It's open daily from 9am to 5pm.

Nearby is **Telstra Stadium** (✆ **02/8765 2300;** www.telstrastadium.com.au), the site of the opening and closing ceremonies, the track and field events, and some Olympic soccer games. It was called Stadium Australia back then. Today it schedules Australian Rules games and rugby league, rugby union, and soccer matches. A 30-minute tour of the stadium costs A$15 (US$12) for adults, A$7.50 (US$6) for children, and A$42 (US$34) for families. A 1-hour behind-the-scenes tour is A$26

(US$21) for adults, A$13 (US$10) for children, and A$60 (US$48) for families. Tours leave hourly from 10:30am to 3:30pm.

Also at the Olympic Park is the **Sydney International Aquatic Centre** (✆ **02/9752 3666;** www.sydneyaquaticcentre.com.au), which comprises the Olympic pool, diving pool, and training facilities. A 50-minute tour of the aquatic center, including a swim and a spa afterward, costs A$17 (US$14) for adults, A$8.50 (US$6.80) for kids 4 to 15, A$47 (US$38) for families. Call ahead to make an appointment. Just a swim costs A$5.80 (US$4.65) adults, A$4.60 (US$3.70) kids 4 to 15, and A$19 (US$15) for families.

There are wonderful views of the Sydney Olympic Park and the city from Level 17 of the **Novotel Hotel** (✆ **02/8762 1111**), located in the park. Admission to the observation area costs A$4 (US$3.20) for adults, A$2 (US$1.60) for children over 7. You can purchase a SuperPass covering admission to the Observation Center at the Novotel and a guided tour of Stadium Australia and the Sydney Aquatic Center (including swimming). Tickets are available from participating venues or the visitor center for A$40 (US$32) for adults, A$20 (US$16) for children, and A$79 (US$63) for families.

One of the best ways to get to the Olympic Site is on the Sydney Explorer bus.

Sydney Olympic Site, Olympic Park, Homebush Bay. Homebush Bay Information Centre ✆ **02/9714 7888.** www.sydneyolympicpark.nsw.gov.au. CityRail: Olympic Park. Sydney Explorer bus.

**Sydney Tower** ★ *Kids* The tallest building in the Southern Hemisphere is not hard to miss—Sydney Tower (also known as Centrepoint Tower) resembles a giant steel pole skewering a golden marshmallow. More than 300m (984 ft.) tall, the tower offers stupendous 360-degree views across Sydney and as far as the Blue Mountains. Fortunately, an elevator takes you to the indoor viewing platform on the top floor; if you were to walk up the fire escape, you'd have to climb 1,504 steps. The general admission includes OzTrek—a rotating auditorium that takes visitors through four Australian landscapes: Outback, rainforest, reef, and city. The final stop is OzTrek, where visitors are strapped into moving chairs in front of a 180-degree screen. On this simulator ride, you white-water raft in Queensland, climb Uluru (Ayers Rock), and have a close encounter with a saltwater crocodile. It's great fun, and kids love it. Don't be too concerned if you feel the building tremble slightly, especially in a stiff breeze—I'm told it's perfectly natural. Below the tower are three floors of stores and restaurants. Allow 1 hour.

New in 2005, **SkyWalk** (✆ **02/9333 9222;** www.skywalk.com.au) allows adventurers to walk in the open air on top of Sydney Tower. As you'll be 268m (879 ft.) above ground level, you'll need to strap on a sliding safety harness. The views and the height will be stupefying. The price, which varies according to the time and day of week, is A$109 to A$139 (US$87–US$111) for adults and A$85 to A$105 (US$68–US$84) for children (must be at least 10 years old).

Pitt and Market sts. ✆ **02/9223 0933.** sydneytower.com.au. Admission A$22 (US$18) adults, A$13 (US$10) children 5–16, A$46 (US$37) families (up to 3 kids). Daily 9am–10:30pm. CityRail: St. James or Town Hall. Sydney Explorer bus.

## 'ROOS, KOALAS & OTHER AUSSIE WILDLIFE

The Sydney Aquarium is discussed on p. 147.

**Australian Reptile Park** What started as a one-man operation supplying snake antivenin in the early 1950s has become a nature park teeming with the slippery-looking creatures. But it's not all snakes and lizards; you'll also find saltwater crocodiles and

American alligators, as well as plenty of somewhat cuddlier creatures, such as koalas, platypuses, wallabies, dingoes, and flying foxes. The park is on beautiful bushland crossed by nature trails. A devastating fire burned down the entire park in mid-2000, killing all of the animals. The staff has worked valiantly to start up a new collection. The park is a short detour off the route heading up to the Hunter Valley, Barrington Tops, and Port Stephens. Somersby is near Gosford, 84km (52 miles) north of Sydney.

Pacific Hwy., Somersby. ✆ **02/4340 1022.** www.reptilepark.com.au. Admission A$18 (US$14) adults, A$12 (US$9.60) children, A$46 (US$37) families. Daily 9am–5pm. Closed Dec 25. CityRail: Gosford (trains leave Central Station every 30 min.). By car: Take the Pacific Hwy. and the Sydney-Newcastle Fwy. (F3); the trip takes about 1 hr.

**Featherdale Wildlife Park** ★★ *Kids* If you have time to visit only one wildlife park in Sydney, make it this one. The selection of Australian animals is excellent, and, most important, the animals are very well cared for. You could easily spend a couple of hours here despite the park's compact size. You'll have the chance to hand-feed friendly kangaroos and wallabies, and get a photo taken next to a koala. (There are many here, both the New South Wales variety and the larger Victorian type.) The park's newest addition is the **Reptilian Pavilion.** It houses 30 different native species of reptiles in 26 realistic exhibits.

217 Kildare Rd., Doonside. ✆ **02/9622 1644.** Fax 02/9671-4140. www.featherdale.com.au. Admission A$18 (US$14) adults, A$8.50 (US$6.80) children 3–15, A$45 (US$36) families. Daily 9am–5pm. CityRail: Blacktown, then bus no. 725 (ask driver to tell you when to get off). By car: Take the M4 motorway to Reservoir Rd., turn off, travel 4km (2½ miles), then turn left at Kildare Rd.

**Koala Park** This is probably the only place in the country (unless you travel to Kangaroo Island in South Australia) where you'll be able to spot this many koalas in one place. In all, around 55 koalas roam within the park's leafy boundaries. Free koala cuddling sessions take place at 10:20, 11:45am, 2, and 3pm daily. There are wombats, dingoes, kangaroos, wallabies, emus, and native birds here, too. You can hire a private guide to take you around for A$70 (US$56) for a 2-hour session, or hitch onto one of the free "hostess" guides who wander around the park like Pied Pipers.

84 Castle Hill Rd., West Pennant Hills. ✆ **02/9484 3141** or 02/9875 2777. www.koalapark.com. Admission A$18 (US$14) adults, A$8 (US$6.40) children, A$46 (US$37) families. Daily 9am–5pm. Closed Dec 25. CityRail: Pennant Hills station via North Strathfield (45 min.), then bus no. 651, 652, 653, 654, or 655 to park.

**Oceanworld Manly** Though not as impressive as the Sydney Aquarium, Oceanworld can be combined with a visit to Manly Beach (see "North of Sydney Harbour," below) for a nice day's outing. There's a decent display of Barrier Reef fish, as well as giant sharks. Also here are the five most venomous snakes in the world. Shark feeding is at 11am on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. There is also a **"dive with the sharks" program,** where you can dive in the tanks with giant gray nurse sharks. It costs A$165 (US$132) for qualified divers; A$195 (US$156) for qualified divers who have logged less than 15 dives or haven't dived in the past 6 months, or A$220 (US$176) for nonqualified divers (includes an introductory course to scuba diving; participants must be at least 14 years old and must be able to swim). You must download an application form from the website.

West Esplanade, Manly. ✆ **02/8251 7877.** www.oceanworld.com.au. Admission A$17 (US$14) adults, A$8.95 (US$7.15) children, A$42 (US$34) families. Daily 10am–5:30pm. Ferry or JetCat: Manly.

**Taronga Zoo** Taronga has the best view of any zoo in the world. Set on a hill, it looks out over Sydney Harbour, the Opera House, and the Harbour Bridge. It's easiest on the legs to explore the zoo from the top down. The main attractions are the fabulous

chimpanzee exhibit, the gorilla enclosure, and the Nocturnal Houses, where you can see some of Australia's many nighttime marsupials, including the platypus and the cuter-than-cute bilby (the official Australian Easter bunny), out and about. There's an interesting reptile display, a couple of impressive Komodo dragons, a scattering of indigenous beasties—including a few koalas, echidnas, kangaroos, dingoes, and wombats—and lots more. The kangaroo and wallaby exhibit is unimaginative; you'd be better off going to Featherdale Wildlife Park (see above). Animals are fed at various times during the day. The zoo can get crowded on weekends, so I strongly advise visiting during the week or early in the morning on weekends. Interestingly, the three sun bears near the lower ferry entrance and exit were rescued by an Australian businessman, John Stephens, from a restaurant in Cambodia, where they were to have their paws cut off and served in soup. There's a lot of redevelopment going on at the zoo, so expect some annoying renovations when you visit. Allow around 3 hours.

Bradley's Head Rd., Mosman. ✆ **02/9969 2777.** www.zoo.nsw.gov.au. Admission A$27 (US$22) adults, A$14 (US$11) children 4–15, A$70 (US$56) families. Admission includes a trip on the Aerial Safari cable car. Daily 9am–5pm (until 9pm Jan). Ferry: Taronga Zoo (lower zoo entrance is at ferry terminal).

## HITTING THE BEACH

One of the big bonuses of visiting Sydney in the summer (Dec–Feb) is that you get to experience the beaches in their full glory.

Most major city beaches, such as Manly and Bondi, have lifeguards on patrol, especially during the summer. They check the water conditions and are on the lookout for **"rips"**—strong currents that can pull a swimmer out to sea. Safe places to swim are marked by red and yellow flags. You must always swim between these flags. If you are using a foam or plastic body board or "boogie board," it's advisable to use it between the flags. Fiberglass surfboards must be used outside the flags. (Expect a warning from the beach loudspeakers and an A$100/US$80 fine if you fail to take notice.)

**WHAT ABOUT SHARKS & OTHER NASTIES?** One of the first things visitors wonder when they hit the water in Australia is: *Are there sharks?* The answer is yes, but fortunately they are rarely spotted inshore—you are far more likely to spy a migrating whale. In reality, sharks have more reason to be scared of us than we of them; most of them end up as the fish in your average packet of fish and chips. (Shark filets are often sold as "flake.") Though some beaches—such as the small beach next to the Manly ferry wharf and a section of Balmoral Beach in Mosman—have permanent shark nets, most rely on portable nets that are moved from beach to beach.

Another common problem off Sydney's beaches are **"blue bottles"**—small blue jellyfish, often called "stingers" in Australia and "Portuguese-men-o'-war" elsewhere. You'll often find these creatures (which are not the same as the stingers around the Great Barrier Reef) washed up along the beach; they become a hazard for swimmers when there's a strong breeze coming off the ocean and they're blown in to shore (watch out for warning signs erected on the shoreline). Minute individual stinging cells often break off the main body of the creature, and they can cause minor itching or stinging. Or you might be hit by the full force of a blue bottle, which will often stick to your skin and wrap its tentacles around you. Blue bottles deliver a hefty punch from their many stinging cells, causing a severe burning sensation almost immediately. Wearing a T-shirt in the water reduces the risk somewhat (though a pair of waterlogged jeans isn't a good idea). If you are stung, rinse the area liberally with seawater or fresh water to remove any tentacles stuck in the skin. For intense pain, apply heat or cold,

whichever feels better. If you experience breathing difficulties or disorientation, seek medical attention immediately.

## SOUTH OF SYDNEY HARBOUR

Sydney's most famous beach is **Bondi** ★★. In many ways it's a raffish version of a California beach, with plenty of tanned skin and in-line skaters. Though the beach is nice, it's cut off from the cafe and restaurant strip that caters to beachgoers by a road that pedestrians have to funnel across in order to reach the sand. On summer weekend evenings it's popular with souped-up cars and groups of disaffected youths. To reach Bondi Beach, take the CityRail train to Bondi Junction, then transfer to bus no. 380 (a 15-min. bus journey). You can also catch bus no. 380 directly from Circular Quay (but it can take an hour or so at peak times).

If you follow the water along to your right at Bondi, you'll come across a scenic cliff-top trail that takes you to **Bronte Beach** (a 20-min. walk), via gorgeous little **Tamarama,** nicknamed "Glamourama" for its trendy sun-worshippers. This boutique beach is known for its dangerous rips. Bronte has better swimming than Bondi. To go straight to Bronte, catch bus no. 378 from Circular Quay or pick up the bus at the Bondi Junction CityRail station.

**Clovelly Beach,** farther along the coast, is blessed with a large rock pool carved into a rock platform and sheltered from the force of the Tasman Sea. This beach is accessible for visitors in wheelchairs on a series of ramps. To reach Clovelly, take bus no. 339 from Circular Quay.

The cliff walk from Bondi will eventually bring you to **Coogee,** which has a pleasant strip of sand with a couple of hostels and hotels nearby. To reach Coogee, take bus no. 373 or 374 from Circular Quay (on Pitt, George, and Castlereagh sts., and Taylor Sq. on Oxford St.) or bus no. 314 or 315 from Bondi Junction.

## NORTH OF SYDNEY HARBOUR

On the North Shore you'll find **Manly** ★★, a long curve of golden sand edged with Norfolk Island pines. Follow the crowds shuffling through the pedestrian Corso to the main ocean beach. (Don't be fooled by the two small beaches on either side of the ferry terminal, as some people have—including the novelist Arthur Conan Doyle, who traveled to Manly by ferry and, presuming the small beach near the ferry station was the best the suburb had to offer, did not bother to disembark.)

You'll find one of Sydney's nicest walks here, too. Looking at the ocean, head to your right along the beachfront and follow the coastal path to small and sheltered **Shelly Beach** ★, a nice area for snorkeling and swimming. (A small takeout outlet that sells drinks and snacks sits next to the good, but pricey, Le Kiosk beachfront restaurant.) Follow the bitumen path up the hill to the car park. Here, a track cuts up into the bush and leads toward a firewall, which marks the entrance to the Sydney Harbour National Park. Around here you'll have spectacular ocean views across to Manly and the northern beaches (the headland farther in the distance is Palm Beach). The best way to reach Manly is on a ferry or JetCat from Circular Quay.

Farther north along the coast are a string of ocean beaches. (See the "Greater Sydney" map, earlier in this chapter, for a map of this area.) They include the surf spots of **Curl Curl, Dee Why, Narrabeen, Mona Vale, Newport, Avalon,** and finally **Palm Beach** ★, a long and beautiful strip of sand separated from the calmer waters of **Pittwater** by sand dunes and a golf course. Here you'll find the Barrenjoey Lighthouse, which offers fine views along the coast. Take bus no. 136 or 139 from Manly

*Fun Fact* **Grin & Bare It**

If getting an all-over tan is your scene, you have a couple of options in Sydney. The nudist beach at **Lady Jane Bay** is a short walk from Camp Cove Beach. You get there from Cliff Street in Watsons Bay, reached by walking along the strip of sand—to the right as you look at the sea—at the back of the Watsons Bay Hotel. Or you can try **Cobblers Beach,** off the short, but steep, bush track that leads from the far side of the playing field oval next to the main HMAS *Penguin* naval base at the end of Bradley's Head Road in Mosman. (Follow the procession of men in shorts.) Be prepared for a largely male-oriented scene—as well as the odd boatload of beer-swigging peeping Toms.

to Curl Curl. Bus no. 190 runs from Wynyard to Newport and then via the other northern beaches as far as Palm Beach.

The best harbor beach is at **Balmoral** ★, a wealthy North Shore hangout with some good cafes (the Sandbar is the best for food) and two good, upmarket beach-view restaurants—the **Bathers Pavillion** (✆ **02/9969 5050**) and **The Watermark** (✆ **02/9968 3433**). The beach itself is split into three parts. As you look toward the sea, the middle section is the most popular with sunbathers, and the wide expanse to your left and the sweep of surreally beautiful sand to your right have a mere scattering. There's a caged pool area for swimming. Reach Balmoral on the ferry to Taronga Zoo and then a 5-minute ride on a connecting bus from the ferry wharf, or catch the bus from the stop outside the zoo's top entrance.

## MUSEUMS, GALLERIES, HISTORIC HOUSES & MORE

**Art Gallery of New South Wales** ★ The numerous galleries here present some of the best of Australian art and many fine examples by international artists, including good displays of Aboriginal and Asian art. You enter from the Domain parklands (across the road from the Royal Botanic Gardens) on the third floor of the museum. On the fourth floor you will find an expensive restaurant and a gallery that often mounts free photography displays. On the second floor is a wonderful cafe overlooking the wharves and warships of Woolloomooloo. Every January and February there is a fabulous display of the best work created by school students throughout the state. Allow at least 1 hour.

Art Gallery Rd., The Domain. ✆ **02/9225 1744.** www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au. Free admission to most galleries. Special exhibitions vary; usually around A$12 (US$9.60) adults, A$7 (US$5.60) children. Thurs–Tues 10am–5pm; Wed 10am–9pm. Free tours of general exhibits Sat–Sun 11am, 1, and 2pm; Mon 1 and 2pm; Tues–Fri 11am, noon, 1, and 2pm. Tours of Aboriginal galleries Tues–Sun 11am. Free Aboriginal performance Tues–Sat noon. CityRail: St. James. Sydney Explorer bus.

**Australian Museum** Though nowhere near as impressive as, say, the Natural History Museum in London, Sydney's premier natural history museum is still worth a look. Displays are presented thematically, the best being the Aboriginal section with its traditional clothing, weapons, and everyday implements. There are some sorry examples of stuffed Australian wildlife, too. Temporary exhibits run from time to time. Allow 1 to 2 hours.

6 College St. ✆ **02/9320 6000.** www.austmus.gov.au. Admission A$8 (US$6.40) adults, A$3 (US$2.40) children, A$19 (US$15) families. Special exhibits extra. Daily 9:30am–5pm. Closed Dec 25. CityRail: Museum, St. James, or Town Hall. Sydney Explorer bus.

**Customs House** This museum, in the sandstone building with the clock and flags across the large square opposite the Circular Quay CityRail station and the ferry wharves, opened in December 1998. It's worth a look inside if you're interested in architecture. You might be hooked by the series of modern-art objects displayed on the ground floor, and the traveling exhibits on the third floor—though often you won't be. Outside in the square is a popular cafe selling reasonably priced coffee, cakes, sandwiches, and the like. Allow 15 minutes.

Alfred St., Circular Quay. ✆ **02/9320 6429.** Free general admission; extra charge for some exhibits. Daily 9:30am–5pm. CityRail, bus, or ferry: Circular Quay.

**Elizabeth Bay House** A good example of colonial architecture, this house was built in 1835 and was described at the time as the "finest house in the colony." Visitors can tour the whole house and get a real feeling of the history of the fledgling settlement. The house is on a headland and has some of the best harbor views in Sydney. Allow 1 hour.

7 Onslow Ave., Elizabeth Bay. ✆ **02/9356 3022.** www.hht.net.au/museums. Admission A$7 (US$5.60) adults, A$3 (US$2.40) children, A$17 (US$14) families. Tues–Sun 10am–4:30pm. Closed Good Friday and Dec 25. Bus: 311 from Circular Quay or Sydney Explorer.

**Museum of Sydney** You'll need to have your brain in full working order to make the most of the contents of this three-story postmodern building near Circular Quay, which encompasses the remnants of Sydney's first Government House. The place is far from a conventional showcase of history; instead, it houses a rather minimalist collection of first-settler and Aboriginal objects and multimedia displays that invite the museum-goer to discover Sydney's past for him- or herself. Some Frommer's readers have criticized the place, saying it's not just minimalist—it's simply unfathomable. By the way, that forest of poles filled with hair, oyster shells, and crab claws in the courtyard adjacent to the industrial-design cafe tables is called *Edge of Trees.* It's a metaphor for the first contact between Aborigines and the British. There's a reasonable cafe out front. Allow anywhere from an hour to a lifetime to understand.

37 Phillip St. ✆ **02/9251 5988.** www.hht.net.au/museums. Admission A$7 (US$5.60) adults, A$3 (US$2.40) children under 15, A$17 (US$14) families. Daily 9:30am–5pm. CityRail, bus, or ferry: Circular Quay. Sydney Explorer bus.

**State Library of NSW** The state's main library consists of two side-by-side sections, the Mitchell and Dixon libraries. A newer reference-library complex nearby has two floors of reference materials, local newspapers, and microfiche viewers. Leave your bags in the free lockers downstairs. (You'll need an A$2 coin, which is refundable.) I highly recommend the library's leafy **Glasshouse Café,** in my opinion one of the best walk-in lunch spots in Sydney. The older building contains many older books on the ground floor and often mounts free art and photography displays in the upstairs galleries. A small library section in the Sydney Town Hall building has international newspapers.

Macquarie St. ✆ **02/9273 1414.** Free admission. Mon–Fri 9am–5pm; Sat–Sun and selected holidays 11am–5pm. Closed Jan 1, Good Friday, and Dec 25–26. CityRail: Martin Place. Sydney Explorer bus.

**St. James Church** Sydney's oldest surviving colonial church, begun in 1822, was designed by the government architect, and former convict, Francis Greenway. At one time the church's spire served as a landmark for ships coming up the harbor, but today it looks totally lost amid the skyscrapers. It's well worth seeking out, though, especially for the plaques on the wall, which pay testament to the hard early days of the colony

when people were lost at sea, were "speared by blacks," and died while serving the British Empire overseas.

Queens Sq., Macquarie St. ✆ **02/9232 3022.** Daily 8am–5pm.

**St. Mary's Cathedral** Sydney's most impressive place of worship is a giant sandstone construction between The Domain and Hyde Park. The original St Mary's was built in 1821, but the chapel was destroyed by fire. Work on the present cathedral began in 1868, but due to lack of funds, it remained unfinished until construction of the two spires began in 1999. The stained-glass windows inside are impressive. St. Mary's is Roman Catholic and was built for Sydney's large population of Irish convicts. In perhaps Sydney's worst pre-Olympic planning, the beautiful brown sandstone building was marred by a wide stretch of dark gray paving outside—now the battleground contested by skateboarders and city council types. The two spires were completed in extra-quick time for the Olympics, too.

College and Cathedral sts. ✆ **02/9220 0400.** Mon–Fri 6:30am–6:30pm; Sat 8am–7:30pm; Sun 6:30am–7:30pm.

**Sydney Jewish Museum** Harrowing exhibits here include documents and objects relating to the Holocaust and Jewish culture, mixed with soundscapes, audiovisual displays, and interactive media. There's also a museum shop, a resource center, a small theater, and a traditional kosher cafe. It's considered one of the best museums of its type in the world. Allow 1 to 2 hours.

148 Darlinghurst Rd., Darlinghurst. ✆ **02/9360 7999.** Fax 02/9331 4245. www.sjm.com.au. Admission A$10 (US$8) adults, A$6 (US$4.80) children, A$22 (US$18) families. Sun–Thurs 10am–4pm; Fri 10am–2pm. Closed Jewish holidays, Good Friday, and Dec 25. CityRail: Kings Cross.

**Sydney Observatory** ★ The city's only major museum of astronomy offers visitors a chance to see the southern skies through modern and historic telescopes. The best time to visit is during the night on a guided tour, when you can take a close-up look at some of the planets. However, the introduction of a new **Space Theatre 3D ride,** which takes you zooming through the stars during the day, is worth doing, too. During the day you can still see the fascinating telescopes. The Space Theatre starts at 2:30 and 3:30pm Mondays to Fridays, and 11am, noon, 2, and 3:30pm on weekends and daily during school holidays. Night tours go from 6:15 to 8pm and 8:15 to 10pm April to September; 8:15 to 10:00pm October and November; 8:30 to 10:15pm December and January; and 8:15 to 10:00pm February and March. Schedules are subject to change, so be sure to check the times when you book your tour. The planetarium and hands-on exhibits are also interesting.

Observatory Hill, Watson Rd., Millers Point. ✆ **02/9217 0485.** www.sydneyobservatory.com.au. Daytime A$6 (US$4.80) adults, A$4 (US$3.20) children, A$16 (US$13) families. Guided night tours (reservations required) A$15 (US$12) adults, A$10 (US$8) children, A$40 (US$32) families. Daily 10am–5pm. CityRail, bus, or ferry: Circular Quay.

**Vaucluse House** Overlooking Sydney Harbour, this house has lavish entertainment rooms and impressive stables and outbuildings. It was constructed in 1803 and was the home of Charles Wentworth, the architect of the Australian Constitution. It's set in 11 hectares (27 acres) of gardens, bushland, and beach frontage—perfect for picnics. Allow 1 hour.

Wentworth Rd., Vaucluse. ✆ **02/9337 1957.** www.hht.net.au/museums. Admission A$7 (US$5.60) adults, A$3 (US$2.40) children. House Tues–Sun 10am–4:30pm; grounds daily 7am–5pm. Free guided tours. Closed Good Friday and Dec 25. Bus: 325 from Circular Quay, or Bondi & Bay Explorer.

## PARKS & GARDENS

### IN SYDNEY

**ROYAL BOTANIC GARDENS** If you are going to spend time in one of Sydney's green spaces, then make it the **Royal Botanic Gardens** ★ (✆ **02/9231 8111;** www.rbgsyd.nsw.gov.au/sydney_gardens_domain), next to the Sydney Opera House. The gardens were laid out in 1816 on the site of a farm dedicated to supplying food for the colony. They're informal in appearance, with a scattering of duck ponds and open spaces, though several areas are dedicated to particular plant species. These include the rose garden, the cacti and succulent display, and the central palm and rainforest groves (look for the thousands of large fruit bats, which chatter and argue among the rainforest trees). **Mrs. Macquarie's Chair,** along the coast path, offers superb views of the Opera House and the Harbour Bridge. The "chair" is a step cut out of sandstone with a huge stone plaque on top. It bears the name of Elizabeth Macquarie (1788–1835), the wife of Gov. Lachlan Macquarie. (It's a favorite stop for tour buses.)

The sandstone building dominating the gardens nearest to the Opera House is the **Government House** (✆ **02/9931 5222;** www.hht.net.au/museums), once the official residence of the governor of New South Wales. (He moved out in 1996 in the spirit of republicanism.) The pleasant gardens are open to the public daily from 10am to 4pm, and the house is open Friday through Sunday from 10am to 3pm. Entrance to both is free. If you plan to park around here, note that parking meters cost upwards of A$4 (US$3.20) per hour, and you need A$1 coins.

A popular walk takes you through the Royal Botanic Gardens to the **Art Gallery of New South Wales.** The gardens are open daily from 7am to dusk. Admission is free.

**HYDE PARK** In the center of the city is Hyde Park, a favorite with lunching businesspeople. Of note here are the **Anzac Memorial** to Australian and New Zealand troops killed in the wars and the **Archibald Fountain,** complete with spitting turtles and sculptures of Diana and Apollo. At night, twinkling lights illuminate avenues of trees, giving the place a magical appearance.

**MORE CITY PARKS** Another Sydney favorite is giant **Centennial Park** (✆ **02/9339 6699**), usually entered from the top of Oxford Street. It opened in 1888 to celebrate the centenary of European settlement and today encompasses huge areas of lawn, several lakes, picnic areas with outdoor grills, cycling and running paths, and a cafe. It's open from sunrise to sunset. To get there, take bus no. 373, 374, 378, 380, or 382 from the city, or the Bondi & Bay Explorer.

A hundred years later, **Bicentennial Park,** at Australia Avenue, in Homebush Bay, came along. Forty percent of the park's total 100 hectares (247 acres) is general parkland reclaimed from a city dump; the rest is the largest existing remnant of wetlands on the Parramatta River and is home to many species of local and migratory wading birds, cormorants, and pelicans. Follow park signs to the **visitor information office** (✆ **02/9763 1844**), open Monday through Friday from 10am to 4pm and Saturday and Sunday from 9:30am to 4:30pm. To reach the park, take a CityRail train to Homebush Bay station.

### BEYOND SYDNEY

**SYDNEY HARBOUR NATIONAL PARK** You don't need to go far to experience Sydney's nearest national park. The Sydney Harbour National Park stretches around parts of the inner harbor and includes several small islands. (Many first-time visitors

are surprised at the amount of bushland remaining in prime real-estate territory.) The best walk through the Sydney Harbour National Park is the **Manly to Spit Bridge Scenic Walkway** (✆ **02/9977 6522**). This 10km (6-mile) track winds its way from Manly (it starts near the Oceanarium) via Dobroyd Head to Spit Bridge, where you can catch a bus back to the city. The walk takes around 3 hours at a casual pace, and the views across busy Sydney Harbour are fabulous. There are a few Aboriginal stone carvings, which are signposted along the route. Maps are available from the **Manly Visitors Information Bureau** (✆ **02/9977 1088**), opposite the main beach.

Other access points to the park include tracks around Taronga Zoo (ask the zoo staff to point you toward the obscured entrances) and above tiny Shelly Beach, opposite the main beach at Manly.

Also part of the national park is recently restored **Fort Denison,** in the middle of the harbor between Circular Quay and Manly. The fort was built during the Crimean War in response to fears of a Russian invasion and was later used as a penal colony. One- to 2-hour **Heritage Tours** of the island leave from Cadmans Cottage, 110 George St., in The Rocks (✆ **02/9247 5033**). They cost A$22 (US$18) for adults and A$18 (US$14) for students and children. Call ahead for times and bookings. Pick up maps of the Sydney Harbour National Park at Cadmans Cottage.

Another great walk can be combined with lunch or a drink at Watsons Bay. A 15-minute bush stroll to **South Head** starts from the beach outside the Watsons Bay Hotel. Walk to the end of the beach (to your right as you look at the water), up the steps to Short Street, then left along Cliff Street to the end of Camp Cove Beach. Continue along the coast past the nudist Lady Bay Beach to the lighthouse at South Head, where there are some great views (of the coastline, not the nudists). Across the road in front of the Watsons Bay Hotel is another section of the national park, known for its cliff-top views. Here you'll find The Gap, a sheer cliff popular for suicides, sadly. Ferries from Circular Quay and the Bondi & Bay Explorer go to Watsons Bay.

**MORE NATIONAL PARKS** Forming a semicircle around the city are Sydney's biggest parks of all. To the west is the **Blue Mountains National Park** (see chapter 5), to the northeast is **Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park,** and to the south is the magnificent **Royal National Park.** All three parks are home to marsupials such as echidnas and wallabies, numerous bird and reptile species, and a broad range of native plant life. Walking trails, which take as little as half an hour to as long as a few days to cover, make each park accessible to the visitor.

**Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park** (✆ **02/9457 9322** or 02/9457 9310; www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au) is a great place to take a bushwalk through gum trees and rainforest on the lookout for wildflowers, sandstone rock formations, and Aboriginal art. There are plenty of tracks through the park; one of my favorites is a relatively easy 2.5km (1.5-mile) tramp to **The Basin** (Track 12). The well-graded dirt path takes you down to a popular estuary with a beach and passes some significant Aboriginal engravings. There are also wonderful water views over Pittwater from the picnic areas at **West Head.** Pick up a free walking guide at the park entrance or gather maps and information in Sydney at the National Parks & Wildlife Service's center at **Cadmans Cottage,** 110 George St., The Rocks (✆ **02/9247 8861**).

The park is open from dawn to dusk; admission is A$10 (US$8) per car. You can drive to the park or catch a ferry from Palm Beach to The Basin (from there, you can walk up Track 12 and back). Ferries run on the hour (except at 1pm) from 9am to 5pm daily and cost A$4 (US$3.20) per person one-way; call ✆ **02/9918 2747** for

details. Shorelink bus no. 577 runs from the Turramurra CityRail station to the nearby park entrance every hour on weekdays and every 2 hours on weekends; call ✆ **02/9457 8888** for details. There is no train service to the park. Camping is allowed only at The Basin (✆ **02/9457 9853**) and costs A$12 (US$9.60) for two people booked in advance.

If you have a car you could visit the **Ku-ring-gai Wildflower Garden,** 420 Mona Vale Rd., St. Ives (✆ **02/9440 8609**), which is essentially a huge area of natural bushland and a center for urban bushland education. There are plenty of bushwalking trails and self-guided walks, and a number of nature-based activities. It's open daily from 8am to 4pm. Admission is A$2.50 (US$2) for adults, A$1 (US80¢) for children, and A$6 (US$4.80) for families.

South of Sydney is the remarkable **Royal National Park,** Farrell Avenue, Sutherland (✆ **02/9542 0648;** www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au). It's the world's oldest national park, declared in 1879. (The main competitor to the title is Yellowstone in the United States, which was set aside for conservation in 1872 but not designated a national park until 1883.) Severe bushfires almost destroyed the whole lot in early 1994, but the trees and bush plants have recovered remarkably. There's no visitor center, but you can get information at park entrances, where you'll have to pay an A$11 (US$8.80) per-car admission fee.

There are several ways to reach the park, but my favorites are the little-known access points from Bundeena and Otford. To get to **Bundeena,** take a CityRail train from Central Station to the seaside suburb of Cronulla (around 1 hr.). Just below the train station, through an underpass, you'll find Cronulla Wharf. From there, hop on the delightful ferry run by **National Park Ferries** (✆ **02/9523 2990;** www.cronullaand nationalparkferrycruises.com) to Bundeena, which I highly recommend you visit. There are three stunning beaches here. Ferries run on the half-hour (except 12:30pm on weekdays), starting at 5:30am weekdays, 8:30am weekends, and stop at around 7pm. After you get off the ferry, the first turn on your left just up the hill will take you to wonderful Jibbon Beach. Walk along the beach to the end, hop up some rocks, and follow the trail (about 20 min.) through the park to Jibbon Head for some stunning ocean views. Look out for the Aboriginal rock carvings off to your right before you reach it (the sign's a little obscured). It's around a 3-hour round-trip walk to Marley Beach (which has strong surf and dangerous rips) and a 6-hour round-trip to beautiful Wattamolla, where there's safe swimming for children in the salty lagoon. The ferry returns to Cronulla from Bundeena hourly on the hour (except 1pm on weekdays). The fare is A$4.50 (US$3.60) per person each way.

An alternative way to reach the park is to take the train from Central Station to **Otford,** then climb the hill up to the sea cliffs. If you're driving, you might want to follow the scenic cliff-edge road down into Wollongong. The entrance to the national

### *Tips* A Stroll on The Rocks

Sydney is relatively compact, so it's a wonderful city for exploring on foot. I particularly recommend a wander through The Rocks, site of the oldest settlement in Australia, a rough-and-tumble place where prostitutes, gang members, and other shady characters loitered more than a century ago. **The Rocks Walking Tour** (✆ **02/9247 6678**) has an organized stroll (see "Walking Tours," below).

park is a little tricky to find, so you might have to ask directions—but roughly, it's just to the left of a cliff-top popular for hang-gliding, radio-controlled airplanes, and kites. A 2-hour walk from the sea cliffs through beautiful and varying bushland and a palm forest will take you to Burning Palms Beach. There is no water along the route. The walk back up is steep, so attempt this trek only if you're reasonably fit. Trains to the area are irregular, and the last one departs around 4pm, so give yourself at least 2½ hours for the return trip to the train station to make sure you don't get stranded. It's possible to walk the memorable 26km (16 miles) from Otford to Bundeena, or vice versa, in 2 days. (Take all your food, water, and camping gear.) The trail sticks to the coast, crosses several beaches, and is relatively easy to follow.

### ESPECIALLY FOR KIDS

Kids can have fun at plenty of places in Sydney, but my choices below are particularly suitable for youngsters. (All are reviewed in full above.)

At **Taronga Zoo** (p. 149), an all-time favorite with kids, the barnyard animals, surprisingly, get as much attention as the koalas. If your kids want hands-on contact with the animals, though, you'd better head to **Featherdale Wildlife Park** (p. 149), where they can get their photo taken next to a koala, and hand-feed and stroke kangaroos and wallabies. You can't stroke koalas in New South Wales. Even more interactive are the exhibits just crying out to be touched and bashed at the **Powerhouse Museum** (p. 146).

The sharks at **Oceanworld** (p. 149) in Manly and at the **Sydney Aquarium** (p. 147) in Darling Harbour are big lures for kids, too, and the thrill of walking through a long Plexiglas tunnel as giant manta rays perch over their heads will lead to more squeals of excitement.

Another outing for both adults and children is to crawl around inside boats and submarines at the **Australian National Maritime Museum** (p. 146).

And what kid wouldn't enjoy a day at the beach? Sydney's got plenty to choose from, like **Bondi** and **Manly.**

## 6 Harbor Cruises & Organized Tours

For details on the **Sydney Explorer** bus, see "Getting Around," earlier this chapter.

### HARBOR CRUISES

The best thing about Sydney is the harbor, and you shouldn't leave without taking a harbor cruise. **Sydney Ferries** (✆ **13 15 00** in Australia, or 02/9245 5600; www.sta.nsw.gov.au) offers a 1-hour morning harbor cruise with commentary departing Circular Quay, Wharf 4, daily at 10 and 11:15am. It costs A$15 (US$12) for adults, A$7.50 (US$6) for children under 16, and A$38 (US$30) for families (with any number of children). A 2½-hour afternoon cruise explores more of the harbor; it leaves from Wharf 4 at 1pm on weekdays and 1:30pm on weekends and public holidays. This tour costs A$22 (US$18) for adults, A$11 (US$8.80) for children under 16, and A$55 (US$44) for families. The highly recommended 1½-hour **Evening Harbour Lights tour,** which takes in the city lights as far east as Double Bay and west to Goat Island, leaves Monday through Saturday at 8pm from Wharf 5. The evening tour costs A$19 (US$15) for adults, A$9.50 (US$7.60) for children under 16, and A$48 (US$38) for families.

**Captain Cook Cruises,** departing Jetty 6, Circular Quay (✆ **02/9206 1111;** www.captaincook.com.au), offers several harbor excursions on its sleek vessels, with commentary along the way.

Examples include a 2-hour-20-minute Coffee Cruise departing Jetty 6, Circular Quay, at 10am and 2:15pm daily. It costs A$44 (US$35) for adults, A$24 (US$19) for kids, and A$99 (US$79) for families. Another is a Seafood Buffet Lunch cruise, departing Circular Quay at 12:30pm daily and costing A$57 (US$46) for adults and A$30 (US$24) for children.

Its Sydney Harbour Explorer cruise is popular and stops off at The Rocks, Watson's Bay, Taronga Zoo, and Darling Harbour. You get on and off when you want. It costs A$27 (US$22) for adults, A$14 (US$11) for kids, and A$65 (US$52) for families, and leaves Circular Quay at 9:45, 11:30am, 1:30, and 3:30pm daily.

Another favorite is the 1-hour-15-minute Harbour Highlights Cruise, which costs A$22 (US$18) for adults, A$11 (US$8.80) for kids, and A$59 (US$47) for families. It leaves Circular Quay at 9:30, 11am, 12:45, 2:30, 4, 6, and 7:30pm. The first and last cruises are subject to passenger numbers.

The company also offers a range of dinner cruises.

Captain Cooke cruises have ticket booths at Jetty 6, Circular Quay (open 8:30am–7pm) and at 1 King St. Wharf, Darling Harbour (near the Sydney Aquarium). It has limited open hours of 11am to 4pm daily.

**Matilda Cruises** (✆ **02/9264 7377;** www.matilda.com.au) offers a 1-hour **Rocket Harbour Explorer** narrated sightseeing tour leaving the pontoon at the far end of Sydney Aquarium at Darling Harbour eight times daily beginning at 9:30am (six times daily in winter, Apr–Sept, beginning at 10:30am). You can stay on for the full hour or get off and on again at Circular Quay, the Opera House, Watsons Bay, and Taronga Zoo. The last boat leaves Taronga Zoo at 5:10pm in summer (4:10pm in winter). There's tea and coffee on board. The cruise costs A$24 (US$19) for adults, A$15 (US$12) for children 5 to 12, and A$55 (US$44) for families.

A new service is the **Manly Rocket Express Service,** leaving Darling Harbour and stopping off at Circular Quay, Rose Bay, and Manly before returning. You can get on and off again when you want. There's commentary and coffee and tea. The cruise departs every 90 minutes each day from 9:15am. From Darling Harbour to Manly it takes 45 minutes and costs the same as the Rocket Harbour Explorer described above.

The company also runs morning and afternoon cruises, and lunch and dinner cruises with good food. One example is the Seafood Lunch cruise, with a seafood buffet. It leaves Darling Harbour at noon and Jetty 6 at Circular Quay at 12:30pm. The 1½-hour cruise costs A$62 (US$50) for adults and A$37 (US$30) for kids ages 6 to 12.

Matilda Cruises has a ticket booth at Jetty 6 at Circular Quay and a ticket office next to the Sydney Aquarium at Darling Harbour.

### HARBOR CRUISE TICKETS & INFO

The one-stop shop for tickets and information on all harbor cruises is the **Australian Travel Specialists** (✆ **02/9247 5151;** www.atstravel.com.au). It's a good idea to check websites before you come to Australia or pop into a ticket office at Darling Harbour or Circular Quay because cruise options, departure times, and prices change frequently. You can book on the Net, too.

## WALKING TOURS

The center of Sydney is compact, and you can see a lot in a day on foot. If you want to learn more about Sydney's early history, then book a guided tour with **The Rocks Walking Tour** (✆ **02/9247 6678**), based at the Shop K4, Kendall Lane (off Argyle St., The Rocks). Excellent walking tours leave Monday through Friday at 10:30am,

12:30, and 2:30pm, and Saturday and Sunday at 11:30am and 2pm (in Jan only 10:30am and 2:30pm on weekdays). The 1½-hour tour costs A$16 (US$13) for adults, A$11 (US$8.80) for children 10 to 16, and A$41 (US$33) for families; free for accompanied children under 10.

For other historical walks, contact **Sydney Guided Tours** (✆ **02/9660 7157**). The company's owner, Maureen Fry, has been in the business for over 13 years and employs trained guides qualified in disciplines such as history, architecture, and botany. She offers a range of group tours, including an introductory tour of Sydney, a tour of Macquarie Street, and many others. Call in advance to find out what's available. Walking tours cost A$17 (US$14) per person for 2 hours.

A journey with a difference is **Weird Sydney Ghost and History Tours** (✆ **02/9555 2700;** www.destinytours.com.au). The tour—in a hearse—is fascinating and fun. It explores a section of historic Sydney and more modern additions, including a former VD clinic, the Sydney Opera House, and some buildings along Macquarie Street. It costs A$149 (US$119) per person for the 1½- to 2-hour trip.

### MOTORCYCLE TOURS

**Blue Thunder Motorcycle Tours** (✆ **02/9977 7721** or 0414/278 983) runs Harley-Davidson tours of Sydney, the Blue Mountains, and places around New South Wales. A 1-hour ride (you sit on the back of the bike) around the city costs A$90 (US$72). A half-day trip to the northern beaches or down the south coast through the Royal National Park costs A$265 (US$212), including lunch. Full-day trips cost A$370 (US$296) including lunch and snacks, and go to the Hunter Valley, the south coast, Bathurst, or the Blue Mountains.

If you love motorbikes and want to take one out for a self-guided or guided tour, contact **Bikescape** (✆ **02/9356 2453;** www.bikescape.com.au). It will rent you a bike to go around Sydney, Byron Bay, or the Great Ocean Road in Victoria.

## 7 Staying Active

**BIKING** The best place to cycle in Sydney is Centennial Park. Rent bikes from **Centennial Park Cycles,** 50 Clovelly Rd., Randwick (✆ **02/9398 5027**), which is 200m (656 ft.) from the Musgrave Avenue entrance. (The park has five main entrances.) Mountain bikes cost A$9 (US$7.20) for the first hour, A$13 (US$10) for 2 hours, and A$20 (US$16) for 4 hours.

**Bicycles in The City,** 722 George St., near Central Station (✆ **02/9280 2229**), rents mountain bikes; prices start at A$5 (US$4) per hour, or A$25 (US$20) per day. You can rent in-line skates for the same daily rate with all protective clothing. Helmets are compulsory in Australia.

**FITNESS CLUBS** The **City Gym,** 107 Crown St., East Sydney (✆ **02/9360 6247**), is a busy 24-hour gym near Kings Cross. Drop-in visits are A$10 (US$8).

**GOLF** Sydney has over 90 golf courses and plenty of fine weather. The 18-hole championship course at **Moore Park Golf Club,** Cleveland Street and Anzac Parade, Waterloo (✆ **02/9663 1064**), is the nearest to the city. Visitors are welcome every day except all day Friday and Sunday mornings. Greens fees are A$24 (US$19) Monday through Friday and A$27 (US$22) Saturday and Sunday.

One of my favorite courses is **Long Reef Golf Club,** Anzac Avenue, Colloroy (✆ **02/9982 2943**). This northern beaches course is surrounded by the Tasman Sea

on three sides and has gorgeous views. Greens fees are A$25 (US$20) midweek and A$35 (US$28) on weekends.

For general information on courses, call the **New South Wales Golf Association** (✆ **02/9264 8433**).

**IN-LINE SKATING** The best places to skate are along the beachside promenades at Bondi and Manly beaches and in Centennial Park. **Manly Blades,** 49 N. Steyne (✆ **02/9976 3833**), rents skates for A$12 (US$9.60) for the first hour and A$6 (US$4.80) for each subsequent hour, or A$25 (US$20) per day. Lessons are A$25 (US$20), including 1-hour skate rental and a half-hour lesson. **Bondi Boards & Blades,** 148 Curlewis St., Bondi Beach (✆ **02/9365 6555**), rents skates for A$11 (US$8.80) for the first hour, A$5.50 (US$4.40) for each subsequent hour, and A$20 (US$16) for 24 hours. Ask about a free lesson. **Total Skate,** 36 Oxford St., Paddington, near Centennial Park (✆ **02/9380 6356**), rents skates for A$10 (US$8) for the first hour, A$5 (US$4) for subsequent hours, and A$30 (US$24) for 24 hours. Ask about a free lesson.

**JOGGING** The **Royal Botanic Gardens, Centennial Park,** and any **beach** are the best places to kick-start your body. You can also run across the Harbour Bridge, though you'll have to put up with the car fumes. Another popular spot is along the sea cliffs from Bondi Beach to Bronte Beach.

**PARASAILING** If being strapped to a parachute 100m (328 ft.) above Sydney Harbour while being towed by a speedboat is your idea of fun, contact **Sydney Harbour Parasailing and Scenic Tours** (✆ **02/9977 6781;** www.parasail.net). A regular flight will put you in the air for 8 to 10 minutes at the end of a 100m (328-ft.) line. Flights cost A$69 (US$55 ) per adult. Tandem rides (for children and adults) cost A$118 (US$94) for two people. The boat departs from next to the Manly ferry wharf in Manly.

**SCUBA DIVING** Plenty of people learn to scuba dive in Sydney before taking off for the Barrier Reef. Don't expect coral reefs, though. **Pro Dive,** 27 Alfreda St., Coogee (✆ **02/9665 6333**), offers a 4-day learn-to-dive program costing A$345 (US$276). A day of diving for registered divers costs A$105 (US$84), which includes equipment rental.

**SURFING** **Bondi Beach** and **Tamarama** are the best surf beaches on the south side of Sydney Harbour. **Manly, Narrabeen, Bilgola, Colloroy, Long Reef,** and **Palm** beaches are the most popular on the north side. Most beach suburbs have surf shops where you can rent a board. At Bondi Beach, the **Bondi Surf Co.,** 72 Campbell Parade (✆ **02/9365 0870**), rents surfboards for A$45 (US$36) for 4 hours or A$60 (US$48) all day. Body boards cost A$20 (US$16) for 2 hours and A$60 (US$48) all day. In Manly, **Aloha Surf,** 44 Pittwater Rd. (✆ **02/9977 3777**), rents surfboards. **Manly Surf School** (✆ **02/9977 6977**) offers 2-hour surf classes (for all ages) for A$40 (US$32), 2-day sessions for A$70 (US$56), and 3-day classes for A$90 (US$72). **Wave Action Surf School** (✆ **02/9970 6813,** or 0413/177 242 mobile) charges the same rates as Manly Surf School, on the breakers at Palm Beach. Also, it offers a 1-day surf tour from central Sydney to Palm Beach and other northern Sydney beaches with sightseeing and lunch for A$100 (US$80).

**SWIMMING** The best place to swim indoors in Sydney is the **Sydney Aquatic Centre,** at Olympic Park, Homebush Bay (✆ **02/9752 3666**). It's open Monday through Friday from 5am to 9:45pm, and Saturday, Sunday, and public holidays from

### Finds A Surf Adventure

If you've always fancied learning to surf, then head for **Waves Surf School** (✆ **1800/851 101** in Australia, or 0414/682 228 mobile; www.wavessurfschool.com.au). It takes budding surfers on 1-day trips from Sydney to the Royal National Park. Trips cost A$69 (US$55), including equipment and lunch. If you're young enough to spend the night in a "double-decker party bus," then consider a 2-day surfing trip to Seal Rocks, north of Sydney, for A$189 (US$151). The company also takes adventurous travelers on a 4-day surfing trip from Sydney to Byron Bay for A$399 (US$319).

6am to 7:45pm (6:45pm May–Oct), and charges A$5.80 (US$4.65) adults, A$4.60 (US$3.70) children 4 to 15, and A$19 (US$15) for families.

The most central of Sydney's pools is **Cook and Phillip Park,** 4 College St., at William Street (✆ **02/9326 0444**). The center has three pools: one for serious swimmers, another with a wave machine, and a hydrotherapy pool with easy ramp access and bubble jets. Admission is A$5.50 (US$4.40) for adults and A$4 (US$3.20) for kids. To find it, walk to the cathedral across Hyde Park and continue for a couple of minutes along the dark paved area outside the cathedral's front entrance (keeping Hyde Park on your right). Look for signs directing you down some stairs to the entrance.

Another good bet is the **North Sydney Olympic Pool,** Alfred South Street, Milsons Point (✆ **02/9955 2309**). It's just over the Harbour Bridge, near the amusement park, so why not have a swim after a walk over from the city? Swimming here costs A$3.50 (US$2.80) for adults and A$1.65 (US$1.30) for children. More world records have been broken in this outdoor pool than in any other. There's a separate indoor pool, too.

The **Bondi Icebergs Club,** 1 Notts Ave. (✆ **02/9130 3120**), at Bondi Beach, on the rocks to the right of the beach as you look at the sea, has an Olympic-size pool and a children's pool. Entrance costs A$3.30 (US$2.65) and includes a sauna. (And an excellent restaurant; see review p. 139.)

**TENNIS** There are hundreds of places around the city to play one of Australia's most popular sports. A nice spot is the **Miller's Point Tennis Court,** Kent Street, The Rocks (✆ **02/9256 2222**). It's run by the Observatory Hotel and is open daily from 7:30am to 10pm. The court costs A$25 (US$20) per hour. The **North Sydney Tennis Centre,** 1A Little Alfred St., North Sydney (✆ **02/9371 9952**), has three courts available daily from 6am to 10pm. They cost A$16 (US$13) per hour until 5pm on weekdays and A$20 (US$16) at other times.

**WINDSURFING** My favorite spot to learn to windsurf or to set out onto the harbor is **Balmoral Beach,** in Mosman on the North Shore. Rent boards at **Balmoral Windsurfing, Sailing and Kayaking School & Hire,** 3 The Esplanade, Balmoral Beach (✆ **02/9960 5344**). Windsurfers cost A$27 (US$22) per hour for beginners and A$38 (US$30) for advanced windsurfing equipment. Lessons cost A$175 (US$140) for 5 hours of instruction over a weekend for beginners, and A$195 (US$156) for advanced lessons. This place also rents fishing boats.

**YACHTING** **Balmoral Boat Shed,** Balmoral Beach (✆ **02/9969 6006**), rents catamarans, 3.5m (11-ft.) aluminum runabouts, canoes, and surf skis. The catamarans

and runabouts cost A$35 (US$28) for the first hour (with an A$80/US$64 deposit); a full day costs A$120 (US$96). Other vessels, such as canoes, cost A$12 (US$9.60) per hour with an A$10 (US$8) deposit.

**Sydney by Sail** (✆ **02/9280 1110,** or 0419/367 180 mobile) offers sailing courses on Sydney Harbour. A long, 1-day introductory course costs A$450 (US$360).

## 8 Spectator Sports

**CRICKET** The **Sydney Cricket Ground,** at the corner of Moore Park and Driver Avenue, is famous for its 1-day and test matches, played October through March. Phone the **New South Wales Cricket Association** (✆ **02/9339 0999**) for match details and **Sportspace Tours** (✆ **02/9380 0383**) for stadium tours.

**FOOTBALL** In this city, "football" means rugby league. If you want to see burly chaps pound into each other while chasing an oval ball, then be here between May and September. The biggest venue is the **Sydney Football Stadium,** Moore Park Road, Paddington (✆ **02/9360 6601,** or 1900/963 133 for match information). Buy tickets through **Ticketek** (✆ **02/9266 4800**).

**HORSE RACING** Sydney has four horse-racing tracks: Randwick, Canterbury, Rosehill, and Warwick Farm. The most central and best known is **Randwick Racecourse,** Alison Street, Randwick (✆ **02/9663 8400**). The biggest race day of the week is Saturday. Admission costs A$9 (US$7.20). Call the **Sydney Turf Club** (✆ **02/9930 4000**) with questions about Rosehill and Canterbury, and the Randwick number for Warwick Farm.

**SURFING CARNIVALS** Every summer these uniquely Australian competitions bring crowds to Sydney's beaches to watch surf clubs compete in various watersports. Contact the **Surf Lifesaving Association** (✆ **02/9597 5588**) for times and locations. Other beach events include Iron Man and Iron Woman competitions, during which Australia's fittest struggle it out in combined swimming, running, and surfing events.

**YACHT RACING** Sailing competitions take place on the harbor most summer weekends, but the start of the **Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race** on Boxing Day (Dec 26) is something not to be missed. The race starts from the harbor near the Royal Botanic Gardens.

## 9 Shopping

You'll find plenty of places to keep your credit cards in action in Sydney. Most shops of interest to the visitor are in **The Rocks** and along **George and Pitt streets** (including the shops below the Sydney Tower and along Pitt Street Mall). Other precincts worth checking out are **Mosman** on the North Shore and **Double Bay** in the eastern suburbs for exclusive boutique shopping, **Chatswood** for its general shopping centers, the **Sydney Fishmarket** for the sake of it, and the various **weekend markets** (listed below). ***Note:*** At the time of writing, there was talk about major renovations to Sydney Tower's shopping complex, which may be closed by the time you arrive.

Don't miss the **Queen Victoria Building (QVB),** on the corner of Market and George streets. This Victorian shopping arcade is one of the prettiest in the world and has some 200 boutiques—mostly men's and women's fashion—on four levels. The arcade is open 24 hours, but the shops do business Monday through Saturday from 9am to 6pm (Thurs to 9pm) and Sunday from 11am to 5pm.

Several other arcades in the city center also have potential, including the **Sydney Central Plaza,** beside the Myer department store on Pitt Street Mall, and the **Skygarden Arcade,** which runs from Pitt Street Mall to Castlereagh Street. The **Strand Arcade** (between Pitt Street Mall and George St.) was built in 1892 and is interesting for its architecture and small boutiques, food stores, and cafes, and the Down Town Duty Free store on the basement level.

On **Pitt Street Mall** you'll find record shops, including HMV, a branch of The Body Shop, and boutiques such as Just Jeans, Jeans West, Katies, and Esprit.

**Oxford Street** runs from the city to Bondi Junction through Paddington and Darlinghurst and is home to countless clothing stores for the style conscious. You could easily spend anywhere from 2 hours to a whole day making your way from one end to the other. Detour down William Street once you get to Paddington to visit the headquarters of celebrated international Australian designer Collette Dinnigan. On the same street are the trendy boutiques Belinda and Corner Store (cutting-edge designs), and Pelle and Di Nuovo (luxury recycled goods).

***Tip:*** American Express cards seem to be unpopular with many shop owners.

**SHOPPING HOURS** Regular shopping hours are generally Monday through Wednesday and Friday from 8:30 or 9am to 6pm, Thursday from 8:30 or 9am to 9pm, Saturday from 9am to 5 or 5:30pm, and Sunday from 10 or 10:30am to 5pm. Exceptions are noted in the store listings below.

## SYDNEY SHOPPING FROM A TO Z

### ABORIGINAL ARTIFACTS & CRAFTS

**Aboriginal & Tribal Art Centre** This center carries a wide range of desert paintings and bark paintings, mostly of very high quality. Collectibles such as didgeridoos, fabrics, books, and boomerangs are on sale, too. Open daily from 10am to 5pm. 1st floor, 117 George St., The Rocks. ✆ **02/9247 9625.** Fax 02/9247 4391.

**Coo-ee Aboriginal Art Gallery and Shop** The proprietors of Coo-ee collect artifacts and fine art from more than 30 Aboriginal communities and dozens of individual artists throughout Australia. The gallery also stocks the country's largest collection of limited-edition prints. Also here are plenty of hand-painted fabrics, T-shirts, didgeridoos, boomerangs, sculpture, bark paintings, jewelry, music, and books. Don't expect bargain prices, though; you pay for the quality here. Open Monday through Saturday from 10am to 6pm and Sunday from 11am to 5pm. 98 Oxford St., Paddington. ✆ **02/9332 1544.**

### *Finds* A World-Class Gallery of Aboriginal Art

Quality Aboriginal art from some of Australia's best-known painters is on sale at **Original & Authentic Aboriginal Art** at 79 George St., The Rocks (✆ **02/9251 4222**). Artists whose work is represented include Paddy Fordham Wainburranga, whose paintings hang in the White House in Washington, and Janet Forrester Nangala, whose work has been exhibited in the Australian National Gallery. Expect to pay in the range of A$1,000 to A$4,000 (US$800–US$3,200) for the larger paintings. There are some nice painted pots here, too, costing A$30 to A$80 (US$24–US$64). Open daily from 10am to 6:30pm.

**Didj Beat Didjeridoo's** Here you'll find the most authentic and well-priced didgeridoos in Sydney. Open daily from 10am to 6:30pm. Shop 2, The Clock Tower Sq., corner of Argyle and Harrington sts. ✆ **02/9251 4289.**

**Gavala Aboriginal Art & Cultural Education Centre** I'd head here first if I were in the market for a decent boomerang or didgeridoo. Gavala is entirely owned and operated by Aborigines, and it stocks plenty of authentic Aboriginal crafts, including carved emu eggs, grass baskets, cards, and books. A first-rate painted didgeridoo will cost anywhere from A$100 to A$450 (US$80–US$360). Gavala also sponsors cultural talks, didgeridoo-making lessons, and story-telling sessions. Open daily from 10am to 9pm. Shop 377, Harbourside Festival Marketplace, Darling Harbour. ✆ **02/9212 7232.**

## ART PRINTS & ORIGINALS

**Done Art and Design** Ken Done is known for having designed his own Australian flag, which he hopes to raise over Australia should it abandon its present one following the formation of a republic. The art here is his. The clothing designs—which feature printed sea- and beachscapes, the odd colorful bird, and lots of pastels—are by his wife, Judy. Open daily from 10am to 5:30pm. 1 Hickson Rd., off George St., The Rocks. ✆ **02/9247 2740.**

**Ken Duncan Gallery** This photographer-turned-salesman is making a killing from his exquisite large-scale photographs of Australian scenery. Open daily from 9am to 8pm (to 9pm Thurs) in summer, 9am to 7pm in winter. 73 George St., The Rocks (across from The Rocks Visitor Centre). ✆ **02/9241 3460.** Fax 02/9241 3462.

## BOOKS

You'll find a good selection of specialized books on Sydney and Australia for sale at the **Art Gallery of New South Wales,** the Garden Shop in the **Royal Botanic Gardens,** the **Museum of Sydney,** the **Australian Museum,** and the **State Library of New South Wales.** See listings earlier in this chapter.

**Abbey's Bookshop** This interesting, centrally located shop specializes in literature, history, and mystery, and has a whole floor on language and education. 131 York St., behind the QVB. ✆ **02/9264 3111.**

**Angus & Robertson Bookworld** One of Australia's largest bookshops, with two stories of books—including a good guidebook and Australiana section—and games. 168 Pitt St., Pitt Street Mall. ✆ **02/9235 1188.**

**Dymocks** One of the largest book department stores in the city, Dymocks has three levels of general books and stationery. There's a good travel section with plenty of guides. Open Monday through Wednesday and Friday from 9am to 6pm, Thursday from 9am to 9pm, Saturday from 9am to 5pm, and Sunday from 10am to 5pm. 424–428 George St. (just north of Market St.). ✆ **02/9235 0155.**

**Gleebooks Bookshop** Specializing in art, general literature, psychology, sociology, and women's studies, Gleebooks also has a secondhand store (with a large children's department) down the road at 191 Glebe Point Rd. Open daily 8am to 9pm. 49 and 191 Glebe Point Rd., Glebe. ✆ **02/9660 2333.**

**Goulds Book Arcade** Come here to search for unusual dusty volumes. Located about a 10-minute walk from the Newtown CityRail station, the place is bursting at the seams with many thousands of secondhand and new books, all in a very rough

order. You can browse for hours here. Open daily from 8am to midnight. 32–38 King St., Newtown. ✆ **02/9519 8947.**

**Travel Bookshop** Hundreds of travel guides, maps, Australiana titles, coffee-table books, and accessories line the shelves of this excellent bookshop. There's also an AmEx counter. Open Monday through Friday from 9am to 6pm and Saturday from 10am to 5pm. Shop 3, 175 Liverpool St. (across from the southern end of Hyde Park, near the Museum CityRail station). ✆ **02/9261 8200.**

## CRAFTS

**Australian Craftworks** This place showcases some of Australia's best arts and crafts from some 300 artists from around the country. It's displayed in a former police station built in 1882, a time of economic depression when riots and clashes with police were common in this area. The cells and administration areas are now gallery spaces. Open daily from 8:30am to 7pm. 127 George St., The Rocks. ✆ **02/9247 7156.**

**The Puppet Shop at the Rocks** ★ *Finds* I can't believe I kept walking past the sign outside this place for so many years without looking in. Deep down in the bowels of a historic building, I eventually came across several cramped rooms absolutely packed with puppets, costing a couple of dollars to a couple of hundred. The owners make their own puppets—mostly Australian in style (emus, koalas, that sort of thing)—and import things from all over the world. Wooden toys abound, too. It's the best shop in Sydney! Open daily from 10am to 5:30pm. 77 George St., The Rocks. ✆ **02/9247 9137.**

**Telopea Gallery** The New South Wales Society of Arts and Crafts runs this shop, which exhibits works by its members, all of whom are New South Wales residents. There are some wonderful glass, textile, ceramic, jewelry, metal, and wood-turned items for sale. Open daily from 9:30am to 5:30pm. Shop 2, Metcalfe Arcade, 80–84 George St., The Rocks. ✆ **02/9241 1673.**

## DEPARTMENT STORES

The two big names in Sydney shopping are David Jones and Myer. Both stores are open Monday through Wednesday and Friday through Saturday from 9am to 6pm, Thursday from 9am to 9pm, and Sunday from 11am to 5pm.

**David Jones** (✆ **02/9266 5544**) is the city's largest department store, selling everything from fashion to designer furniture. You'll find the women's section on the corner of Elizabeth and Market streets, and the men's section on the corner of Castlereagh and Market streets.

**Myer** (✆ **02/9238 9111**), formally Grace Brothers, is similar to David Jones, but the building is newer and flashier. It's on the corner of George and Market streets.

## DUTY-FREE SHOPS

Sydney has several duty-free shops selling goods at a discount. To take advantage of the bargains, you need a passport and a flight ticket, and you must export what you buy. The duty-free shop with the best buys is **Downtown Duty Free,** which has two city outlets, one on the basement level of the Strand Arcade, off Pitt Street Mall (✆ **02/9233 3166**), and one at 105 Pitt St. (✆ **02/9221 4444**). Five more stores are at Sydney International Airport and are open from the first to the last flight of the day.

## FASHION

The best places to shop for fashion are the **QVB** and the **Sydney Central Plaza** (on the ground floor of the mall next to the Myer department store on Pitt Street Mall).

The major **Pitt Street Mall** outlets will also keep you up-to-date. For really trendy clothing, head to **Paddington,** and for alternative clothes, go to **Newtown.**

**Country Road** This chain has outlets all across Australia as well as in the United States. The clothes, for both men and women, are good quality but tend to be quite expensive (though you might find something smart). Other branches are in the QVB, the Skygarden Arcade, Bondi Junction, Darling Harbour, Double Bay, Mosman, and Chatswood. 142–146 Pitt St. ✆ **02/9394 1818.**

### Australian Outback Clothing

**R.M. Williams** Moleskin trousers may not be the height of fashion at the moment, but you never know. R.M. Williams boots are famous for being both tough and fashionable. You'll find Akubra hats, Driza-Bone coats, and kangaroo-skin belts, too. 389 George St. (between Town Hall and Central CityRail stations). ✆ **02/9262 2228.**

**Thomas Cook Boot & Clothing Company** Located between Town Hall and Central CityRail stations, this place specializes in Australian boots, Driza-Bone coats, and Akubra hats. There's another shop at 129 Pitt St., near Martin Place (✆ **02/9232 3334**). 790 George St., Haymarket. ✆ **02/9212 6616.** www.thomascookclothing.com.au.

### Men's Fashion

**Esprit Mens** Not so cheap but certainly colorful clothes come out of this designer store where bold hues and fruity patterns are the in thing. Quality shirts cost around A$60 (US$48). Shop 10G, Sydney Central Plaza, 450 George St. ✆ **02/9233 7349.**

**Gowings** ★ Probably the best all-round men's clothing store in Sydney, Gowings sells quality clothing on several levels. There's also an eclectic mix of gardening equipment, gourmet camping gear, odds and ends for the extrovert, a good range of Australian bush hats, and R.M. Williams boots (at around A$250/US$200 a pair). If you want to risk it, you can even get a cheap haircut here. There's a similar store at 319 George St., near the Wynyard CityRail station (✆ **02/9262 1281**). 45 Market St. ✆ **02/9264 6321.**

**Mostrada** If you're looking for good-quality leather items at very reasonable prices, then this is your place. Leather jackets for men and women go for A$199 to A$899 (US$159–US$719), with an average price of around A$400 (US$320). There are also bags, belts, and other leather accessories. Store 15G, Sydney Central Plaza, 450 George St. ✆ **02/9221 0133.**

**Outdoor Heritage** Quality clothing with a yachting influence is what you'll find at this good-looking store specializing in casual, colorful gear. Shop 13G, Sydney Central Plaza, 450 George St. ✆ **02/9235 1560.**

### Women's Fashion

In addition to the places listed below, head to **Oxford Street** (particularly Paddington) for more avant-garde designers.

**Carla Zampatti** Some 30 Carla Zampatti stores around Australia offer stylish fashions at hard-to-swallow prices. Open Monday through Saturday from 10am to 5pm. 143 Elizabeth St. ✆ **02/9264 3257.**

**Dorian Scott** Probably the best place to go for hand-knit sweaters—called "jumpers" in Australia—Dorian Scott has a wide range of garments from more than 200 leading Australian designers. While some items go for A$80 (US$64), others will set you back several hundred. You'll also find accessories for men, women, and children

in this two-story emporium, including Hot Tuna surfwear and Thomas Cook adventure clothing. Open Monday through Saturday from 9:30am to 7pm and Sunday from 10am to 6pm. There are two branches at Sydney International Airport (✆ **02/9667 3255**) and one at the InterContinental Sydney hotel, 117 Macquarie St. (✆ **02/9247 1818**). 105 George St., The Rocks. ✆ **02/9221 8145.** Fax 02/9251 8553.

## FOOD

The goodies you'll find in the food section of **David Jones** department store on Castlereagh Street (the men's section) are enough to tempt anyone. The store sells the best local and imported products to the rich and famous.

**Coles** One of the few supermarkets in the city center, this place is a good bet if you want to cook for yourself or are after ready-made food (including tasty sandwiches) and cheap soft drinks. There's another Coles beneath the giant Coca-Cola sign on Darlinghurst Road, Kings Cross. Open daily from 6am to midnight. Wynyard station, Castlereagh St., Wynyard (opposite the Menzies Hotel and the public bus stands). ✆ **02/9299 4769.**

**Darrell Lea Chocolates** This is the oldest location of Australia's most famous chocolate shop. Pick up some wonderful handmade chocolates as well as other unusual candies, including the best licorice this side of the Kasbah. At the corner of King and George sts. ✆ **02/9232 2899.**

**Sydney Fishmarket** Finding out what people eat can be a good introduction to a new country and, in my opinion, nowhere is this more fascinating than at the local fish market. Here you'll find fish retailers selling everything from shark to Balmain bugs (small crayfish), with hundreds of species in between. Look for the local pelicans being fed the fishy leftovers. There's also a Doyles restaurant and a sushi bar, a couple of cheap seafood eateries, a fruit market, and a good deli. The retail sections are open daily from 7am to 4pm. Get here by light rail (get off at the Fishmarket stop) or walk from Darling Harbour. Parking costs A$2 (US$1.60) for the first 3 hours. At the corner of Bank St. and Pyrmont Bridge Rd., Pyrmont. ✆ **02/9660 1611.**

## GIFTS & SOUVENIRS

The shops at **Taronga Zoo,** the **Oceanarium** in Manly, the **Sydney Aquarium,** and the **Australian Museum** are all good sources for gifts and souvenirs.

**Australian Geographic** A spinoff of the Australian version of *National Geographic* magazine, this store sells good-quality crafts and Australiana. On hand are camping gadgets, telescopes, binoculars, garden utensils, scientific oddities, books, calendars, videos, music, toys, and more. Harbourside Festival Marketplace, Darling Harbour. ✆ **02/9212 6539.** A.M.P. Centrepoint Tower, Pitt St. ✆ **02/9231 5055.**

**Ikonstore** This interesting little store on the pedestrian pathway to the Sydney Opera House from Circular Quay has a fascinating collection of watches and gadgets for the gourmet collector. 16, Opera Quays, East Circular Quay. ✆ **02/9252 6352.**

**National Trust Gift and Bookshop** You can pick up some nice souvenirs, including books, Australiana crafts, and indigenous foodstuffs here. An art gallery on the premises presents changing exhibits of paintings and sculpture by Australians. There's also a cafe. Closed Monday. Observatory Hill, The Rocks. ✆ **02/9258 0154.**

**The Wilderness Society Shop** Australiana is crawling out of the woodwork at this cute little crafts emporium dedicated to spending all its profits on saving the few remaining untouched forests and wilderness areas of Australia. You'll find some quality

crafts items, cute children's clothes, books, cards, and knickknacks. A.M.P. Centerpoint Tower, Castlereagh St. ✆ **02/9233 4674.**

## MARKETS

**Balmain Market** Active from 8:30am to 4pm every Saturday, this market has some 140 vendors selling crafts, jewelry, and knickknacks. Take the ferry to Balmain (Darling St.); the market is a 10-minute walk up Darling Street. On the grounds of St. Andrew's Church, Darling St., Balmain ✆ **02/9555 1791.**

**Bondi Markets** A nice place to stroll around on Sunday after your brunch on Campbell Parade and discover the upcoming young Australian designers. This market specializes in clothing and jewelry, new, secondhand, and retro. It's open Sunday from 9am to 5pm. Bondi Beach School, Campbell Parade. ✆ **02/9398 5486.**

**Paddington Bazaar** At this Saturday-only market you'll find everything from essential oils and designer clothes to New Age jewelry and Mexican hammocks. Expect things to be busy from 10am to 4pm. Take bus no. 380 or 389 from Circular Quay and follow the crowds. On the grounds of St. John's Church, Oxford St., on the corner of Newcome St. ✆ **02/9331 2646.**

**Paddy's Markets** A Sydney institution, Paddy's Markets has hundreds of stalls selling everything from cheap clothes and plants to chickens. It's open Friday through Sunday from 9am to 4:30pm. Above Paddy's Markets is **Market City** (✆ **02/9212 1388**), which has three floors of fashion stalls, food courts, and specialty shops. Of particular interest is the largest Asian-European supermarket in Australia, on level 1, and the **Kam Fook Yum Cha** Chinese restaurant on level 3, also the largest in Australia. At the corner of Thomas and Hay sts., Haymarket, near Chinatown. ✆ **1300/361 589** in Australia, or 02/9325 6924.

**The Rocks Market** Held every Saturday and Sunday, this touristy market has more than 100 vendors selling everything from crafts, housewares, and posters to jewelry and curios. The main street is closed to traffic from 10am to 4pm to make it easier to stroll around. George St., The Rocks. ✆ **02/9255 1717.**

## MUSIC

**Birdland** This is the best store in Sydney for jazz and blues, and it stocks a sizable collection of rare items. The staff is very knowledgeable. 3 Barrack St. ✆ **02/9299 8527.** www.birdland.com.au.

**HMV** This is one of the best music stores in Sydney. The jazz section is impressive. CDs in Australia are not cheap, with most new releases costing around A$30 to A$35 (US$24–US$28). Pitt Street Mall. ✆ **02/9221 2311.**

**Red Eye Records** These two shops, tucked away downstairs in a small arcade not far from Pitt Street Mall and the Strand Arcade, are directly across from one another. The larger store sells a wide range of modern CDs, and the smaller store stocks a great collection of quality secondhand and end-of-the-line CDs for around A$20 (US$16) each. Tank Stream Arcade (downstairs), at the corner of King and Pitt sts. (near Town Hall). ✆ **02/9233 8177** (new recordings) or 02/9233 8125 (secondhand CDs). www.redeye.com.au.

**Sounds Australian** You can find anything you've ever heard that sounds Australian here. From rock and pop to didgeridoo and country, it's all here. And if you haven't a clue what's good and what's bad, you can spend some time listening before you buy. The management is quite knowledgeable. In the Argyle Stores department store, The Rocks. ✆ **02/9247 7290.** Fax 02/9241 2873.

### OPALS

There are plenty of opal shops around in Sydney, but don't expect to walk away with any bargains. Best just to choose one you like and haggle.

**Altman & Cherny** A good selection of opals—black, white, and boulder varieties—as well as jewelry is on sale here. Ask to see "The Aurora Australis," the world-famous black opal valued at A$1 million (US$800,000). 19–31 Pitt St. (near Circular Quay). ✆ **02/9251 4717.**

**Australian Opal Cutters** Learn more about opals before you buy at this shop. The staff will give you lessons about opals to help you compare pieces. Suite 10, Level 4, National Building, 250 Pitt St. ✆ **02/9261 2442.**

### WINE

**Australian Wine Centre** This is one of the best places in the country to pick up Australian wines by the bottle or the case. The shop stocks a wide range of wines from all over Australia, including bottles from small boutique wineries you're unlikely to find anywhere else. Individual tastings are possible at any time, and there are formal tastings every Thursday and Friday from 4 to 6pm. Wine is exported all over the world from here, so if you want to send home a crate of your favorite, you can be assured it will arrive in one piece. The center owns the wine bar and bistro next door, which is open Monday through Saturday from 6am until 10pm. You can drink here without dining. 1 Alfred St., Shop 3 in Goldfields House, Circular Quay. ✆ **02/9247 2755.**

## 10 Sydney After Dark

Australians are party animals when they're in the mood; whether it's a few beers around the barbecue with friends or an all-night rave at a dance club, they're always on the lookout for the next event. You'll find that alcohol plays a big part in the Aussie culture.

### WHERE TO FIND OUT WHAT'S ON

The best way to find out what's on is to get hold of the "Metro" section of the Friday *Sydney Morning Herald* or the "Seven Days" pullout from the Thursday *Daily Telegraph.*

### THE PERFORMING ARTS

If you have an opportunity to see a performance in the **Sydney Opera House,** jump at it. The "House" is actually not that impressive inside, but the walk back after the show toward the ferry terminals at Circular Quay, with the Sydney Harbour Bridge lit up and the crowd all around you debating the best part of this play or who dropped a beat in that performance—well, it's like hearing Gershwin on the streets of New York. You'll want the moment to stay with you forever. For details on Sydney's most famous performing-arts venue, see "What to See & Do in Sydney," earlier in this chapter.

### THE OPERA, SYMPHONY & BALLET

**Australian Ballet** Based in Melbourne, the Australian Ballet tours the country with its performances. The Sydney season, at the Opera House, is from mid-March until the end of April. A second Sydney season runs November through December. Level 15, 115 Pitt St. ✆ **02/9223 9522.** www.australianballet.com.au.

**Australian Chamber Orchestra** Based in Sydney, this well-known company performs at various venues around the city, from nightclubs to specialized music venues,

### Tips It's a Festival!

If you happen to be in Australia in January, plan to attend one of the many events that are part of the annual **Sydney Festival.** The festival kicks off just after New Year's and continues through the month, with recitals, plays, films, and performances at venues throughout the city, including Town Hall, the Royal Botanic Gardens, the Sydney Opera House, and Darling Harbour. Some events are free. "Jazz in The Domain" and "Symphony in The Domain" are two free outdoor performances held in the Royal Botanic Gardens, generally on the third and fourth weekends in January; each event attracts thousands of Sydneysiders. For more information, contact **Festival Ticketek** (✆ **02/9266 4111;** fax 02/9267 4460). Buy tickets and find out about performances on the Web at **www.sydneyfestival.org.au**.

including the Concert Hall in the Sydney Opera House. Opera Quays, 2 East Circular Quay. ✆ **02/9357 4111,** or box office 02/8274 3888. www.aco.com.au.

**Opera Australia** Opera Australia performs at the Sydney Opera House's Opera Theatre. The opera runs January through March and June through November. 480 Elizabeth St., Surry Hills. ✆ **02/9699 1099,** or bookings 02/9319 1088. www.opera-australia.org.au.

**Sydney Symphony Orchestra** The renowned Edo de Waart conducts Sydney's finest symphony orchestra. It performs throughout the year in the Opera House's Concert Hall. The main symphony season runs March through November, and there's a summer season in February. Level 5, 52 William St., East Sydney. ✆ **02/9334 4644,** or box office 02/9334 4600. www.sso.com.au.

## THEATER

Sydney's blessed with plenty of theaters, many more than I have space for here—check the *Sydney Morning Herald,* especially the Friday edition, for information on what's currently in production.

**Belvoir Street Theatre** The hallowed boards of the Belvoir are home to Company B, which pumps out powerful local and international plays upstairs in a wonderfully moody main theater, formerly part of a tomato-sauce factory. Downstairs, a smaller venue generally shows more experimental productions, such as Aboriginal performances and dance. 25 Belvoir St., Surry Hills. ✆ **02/9699 3444.** Tickets around A$34 (US$27).

**Capital Theatre** Sydney's grandest theater plays host to major international and local productions like (cough) Australian singing superstar Kylie Minogue. It's also been the Sydney home of musicals such as *Miss Saigon* and *My Fair Lady.* 13–17 Campbell St., Haymarket, near Town Hall. ✆ **02/9320 5000.** Ticket prices vary.

**Her Majesty's Theatre** A quarter of a century old, this large theater is still trawling in the big musicals. Huge productions that have run here include *Evita* and *Phantom of the Opera.* 107 Quay St., Haymarket, near Central Station. ✆ **02/9212 3411.** Ticket prices average A$55–A$75 (US$44–US$60).

**Wharf Theatre** This wonderful theater is on a refurbished wharf on the edge of Sydney Harbour, just beyond the Harbour Bridge. The long walk from the entrance of the pier to the theater along old creaky wooden floorboards builds up excitement for the show. Based here is the Sydney Theatre Company, a group well worth seeing,

whatever the production. Dinner before the show at the Wharf's restaurant offers special views of the harbor. Pier 4, Hickson Rd., The Rocks. ✆ **02/9250 1777.** www.sydneytheatre.com.au. Ticket prices vary.

## THE CLUB & MUSIC SCENE

### JAZZ, FOLK & BLUES

**The Basement** ★ Australia's hottest jazz club also manages to squeeze in plenty of blues, folk, and funk. Acts appear every night, and it's best to book ahead. Call for the schedule, pick up one at the club, or visit the website. 29 Reiby Place, Circular Quay. ✆ **02/9251 2797.** www.thebasement.com.au. Cover A$15–A$20 (US$12–US$16) for local acts, A$20–A$40 (US$16–US$32) for international performers.

**Side-on Café** Known by locals as one of the few live venues in Sydney to showcase deliciously diverse jazz nearly every night of the week, this surprisingly decent restaurant is part of an arts complex and serves a two-course meal for A$27 (US$22). Patrons are a blend of artists, musicians, and jazz lovers. The Side-on endeavors to promote upcoming local talent as well as established acts and is also home to an art gallery upstairs. Located just over 5km (3 miles) from the center of town, it's not all that central but is easily reached by public transport and well worth the detour. Daily 7pm until late. 83 Paramatta Rd., Anandale, near Anandale Hotel. www.side-on.com.au. Cover A$13 (US$10).

### ROCK

**Metro** A medium-size rock venue with space for 1,000, the Metro is the best place in Sydney to see local and international acts. Tickets sell out quickly. 624 George St. ✆ **02/9264 2666.**

### DANCE CLUBS

Clubs come and go, and change names and music, so check the latest with a phone call. You can also check the "Metro" section in the Friday *Sydney Morning Herald;* free giveaway newspapers available in some bars along Oxford Street have info about the latest clubs.

Nightclub entrance charges change regularly, but generally run about A$10 to A$15 (US$8–US$12). The Bourbon & Beefsteak Bar, with its A$5 (US$4) cover charge, is an oddity.

**Bourbon & Beefsteak Bar** Right in the middle of Sydney's red-light district, this 24-hour restaurant and nightspot has a small dance floor. Bands play on the ground level Friday and Saturday nights. It's popular with a whole range of ages, from 18 to 60. 24 Darlinghurst Rd., Kings Cross. ✆ **02/9358 1144.** Cover A$5 (US$4).

**Chinese Laundry** A couple of dance floors, one with rock walls to enhance the beat of the hip-hop, trance, and dance. What to wear? Dress like you want to *un*impress. Open Friday and Saturday from 11pm to 4am. Below the Slip Inn bar (see "The Bar Scene," below), Sussex St. (turn right as you face the bridge from Cockle Bay across to Darling Harbour, and it's a 2-min. walk). ✆ **02/9299 4777.**

**Home** Cavelike in shape and feel, with a balcony to look down upon the throng, Home has a reputation for bad bouncers—the *Sydney Morning Herald* newspaper had a Christmas party here, and even the influential journalists were abused. Still, it's managed to survive—hope you can. DJs spin funk and heavy drum-and-bass-style music, good for the serious clubber. Cockle Bay Wharf, Darling Harbour. ✆ **02/9266 0600.** Cover A$25 (US$20).

**Mister Goodbar** A young, trendy crowd of locals fills Mister Goodbar's two good-size dance floors, where they can groove to a range of rap, funk, and hip-hop music Wednesday through Saturday. 11 Oxford St., Paddington. ✆ **02/9360 6759.**

**Riche Nightclub** This hot spot for dancing is popular with the local over-25 club set, as well as with hotel guests wanting to shake their booties to typical dance music. Open only Friday and Saturday. In the Sydney Hilton, 259 Pitt St. ✆ **02/9266 2000.** No cover for hotel guests.

**Tantra** "Upmarket nightclubbing for the likes of models and beautiful people from the [affluent] North Shore of Sydney," is how the manager describes this place. The interior is pseudo-Roman with lots of pillars. The club offers hard-core club and dance music: "'70s Boogie Wonderland" night Friday, commercial house music Saturday, and "funky" house music Sunday. Dress code is fashionable, with a shirt collar required for men, and no sneakers. 169 Oxford St., Darlinghurst. ✆ **02/9331 7729.**

## GAY & LESBIAN CLUBS

Sydney has a huge gay community, so there's a very happening scene. The center of it all is Oxford Street, though Newtown has established itself as a major gay hangout, too. For information on events, pick up a copy of the *Sydney Star Observer* or *Lesbians on the Loose,* available at art-house cinemas, cafes, and stores around Oxford Street. Nightclub entrance charges generally range from A$10 to A$15 (US$8–US$12).

**Arq** This 24-hour club has an amazing light show and the best DJs in town. A very big place specializing in the latest dance tunes. Daily 24 hours. 16 Flinders St., Darlinghurst. ✆ **02/9380 8700.**

**Civic** This original Art Deco hotel has been tastefully spruced up to accommodate three levels of entertainment. There's a theater on the lower first floor (basement), a saloon bar on the ground floor, and an Australian restaurant with live jazz upstairs, as well as an outdoor cocktail terrace. Great bands. Open Monday to Saturday. Corner of Pitt and Goulburn sts., Sydney ✆ **02/8267 3181.**

**Gilligan's & Ginger's** A cocktail bar on the first floor of the Oxford Hotel, Gilligan's & Ginger's is home to a thriving social scene and great views of Oxford Street and the city skyline. DJs spin the latest handbag hits for the drag queens. Open daily. 134 Oxford St., Darlinghurst (corner of Taylor Sq.). ✆ **02/9331 3467.**

**The Stonewall Hotel** An institution with three levels of entertainment and many special nights. Don't miss Sydney's Diva, Ricca Paris, at the pickup night Malebox on Wednesdays. Daily noon to 5am. 175 Oxford St., Darlinghurst. ✆ **02/9360 1963.** No cover most nights.

**Taxi Club** "Tacky Club," as it's affectionately known, is a Sydney institution good for "handbag music"—or old pop and new pop. 40 Flinders St., Darlinghurst (near Taylor Sq., Oxford St.). ✆ **02/9331 4256.**

## THE BAR SCENE

Most of Australia's drinking holes are known as "hotels," after the tradition of providing room and board alongside a good drink in the old days. Occasionally you might hear them referred to as pubs. The term *bar* tends to apply in upscale hotels and trendy establishments. Bars close at various times, generally from midnight to around 3am. Unless the listing says otherwise, these bars do not charge a cover.

**Bondi Hotel** This huge conglomerate across the road from Bondi Beach offers pool upstairs, a casual beer garden outside, and a resident DJ Thursday through Sunday from 8pm to 4am. There's also a free nightclub on Friday nights. Watch yourself; too much drink and sun turns some people nasty here. 178 Campbell Parade, Bondi Beach. ✆ **02/9130 3271.**

**Cargo Bar & Lounge** This split-level waterfront bar on the city side of Darling Harbour (past the Sydney Aquarium) has a large ground-floor bar with access to an outdoor beer garden. The lounge upstairs features trendy leather and red footstools (apparently you sit on them). Cocktails and cigars are upstairs and more casual beers downstairs. Some nice pizzas here, too—if you like them topped with emu, crocodile, or kangaroo. 52–60 The Promenade, King Street Wharf. ✆ **02/9262 1777.**

**The Establishment** A trendy night out is in store if you set foot in this restored historic building with its 42m (138-ft.) bar, lots of floor-to-ceiling columns, and pressed-metal ceilings. It's fashionable, and the food downstairs—fish and chips and the like—is nice but unadventurous. There's better eating upstairs in the fine-dining restaurant. 252 George St., City Center. ✆ **02/9240 3000.**

**The Friend in Hand** In the same location as the fantastically cheap Caesar's No Names spaghetti house, The Friend in Hand offers cheap drinks, poetry readings on Tuesday at 8:30pm, a trivia night on Thursday at 8:30pm, and the distinctly unusual Crab Racing Party every Wednesday at around 8pm. Crab fanciers buy a crustacean for around A$4 (US$3.20), give it a name, and send it off to do battle in a race against about 30 others. There are heats and finals, and victorious crustaceans win their owners prizes. 58 Cowper St., Glebe. ✆ **02/9660 2326.**

**Hero of Waterloo Hotel** ★ This sandstone landmark, built in 1845, was once reputedly the stalking ground of press gangs, who'd whack unsuspecting landlubbers on the head, push them down a trapdoor, and cart them out to sea. Today, the strangely shaped drinking hole is popular with the locals. It schedules old-time jazz bands (the musicians are often in their 70s and 80s) on Saturday and Sunday from 1:30 to 6:30pm, and Irish and cover bands Friday to Sunday at 8:30pm. 81 Lower Fort St., The Rocks. ✆ **02/9252 4553.**

**Jacksons on George** A popular drinking spot, this place has four floors of drinking, eating, dancing, and pool playing, and is a popular haunt of tourists and after-work office staff. Pool is expensive here at A$3 (US$2.40) a game (you'll need to ask

### *Tips* Sydney Gay & Lesbian Mardi Gras

Each March Sydney lights up to the biggest carnival this side of Rio. Some 450,000 people pack into the city center, concentrated on Oxford Street, to watch as members of Sydney's GLBT communities pack a punch with colorful floats and frocks. The crowd is diverse, from kids to grannies, and those in the know bring a stepladder or milk crate to get a better view. Sydney's hotels are at their busiest during Mardi Gras, particularly anything with a view of the route. At the post-parade party, sequins, tight pants, and anything outrageously glamorous goes. Some 19,000 revelers attend. For more information, check out the official Mardi Gras website: www.mardigras.org.au.

the rules—Australians have their own), and drinks have a nasty habit of going up in price without warning as the evening wears on. The nightclub plays dance music, and there's a smart-casual dress code. During happy hour (Mon–Fri 5–7pm), drinks cost around one-third less than normal. 178 George St., The Rocks. ✆ **02/9247 2727.** Cover A$10 (US$8) for nightclub Fri–Sat after 10pm.

**Lord Dudley Hotel** This great English-style pub has the best atmosphere of just about any drinking hole in Sydney, with log fires in winter, couches to relax on, three bars, and a restaurant. The best way to get to this is from the Edgecliff CityRail station (between Kings Cross and Bondi Junction). From there, bear right along the edge of the bus station, walk up the hill for 5 minutes, then take a right onto Jersey Road—ask the railway staff for the correct exit if you can find anyone working. 236 Jersey Rd., Woollahra. ✆ **02/9327 5399.**

**Lord Nelson Hotel** ★ *Value* A Sydney sandstone landmark, the Lord Nelson rivals the Hero of Waterloo (above) for the title of Sydney's oldest pub. The drinks are sold English-style, in pints and half-pints, and the landlord even makes his own prize-winning beers. Of those, Three Sheets is the most popular—but if you can't handle falling over on your way home, you might want to try a drop of Quail (a pale beer), Victory (based on an English bitter), and a dark beer called Admiral. You can get some good pub grub here, too. Upstairs there's a more formal brasserie. Kent and Argyle sts., The Rocks. ✆ **02/9251 4044.**

**Marble Bar** Once part of a hotel demolished in the 1970s, the Marble Bar is unique: the only grand cafe–style drinking hole in Australia. With oil paintings, marble columns, and brass everywhere, it's the picture of 15th-century Italian Renaissance architecture, a tourist attraction in itself. Live music, generally jazz or soul, plays here Tuesday through Saturday beginning at 8:30pm. Dress smart on Friday and Saturday evenings. Drinks are normally very expensive, but the happy hour (daily 7–9pm) cuts prices down to what you'd pay during normal drinking hours elsewhere. In the Sydney Hilton, 259 Pitt St. ✆ **02/9266 2000.**

**The Mercantile** Sydney's original Irish bar is scruffy and loud when the Irish music's playing in the evening, but it's an essential stop on any pub crawl in The Rocks. The Guinness is some of the best you'll taste in Sydney. Irish bands kick off every night around 8pm. 25 George St., The Rocks. ✆ **02/9247 3570.**

**Slip Inn** This multifunction bar and bistro setup is a popular place to drink and meet. There's a garden bar downstairs in a courtyard, along with a trattoria selling pizzas. Upstairs there's a Thai bistro that's open for lunch and a large square bar. It's crowded on Friday evenings, but you'll never feel like a sardine. Sussex St., Darling Harbour. ✆ **02/9299 4777.** A 2-min. walk toward the city from the Town Hall/Cockle Bay side of the pedestrian bridge across to Darling Harbour.

**Watsons Bay Hotel** ★★ *Finds* If it's a sunny afternoon, get over to Watsons Bay for the best food you'll find in the sun anywhere. The beer garden serves good seafood and barbecue meat dishes, while you sip your expensive wine or beer overlooking the harbor. Nearby are the fabulous Doyles Wharf Restaurant and Doyles at the Beach takeout. 1 Military Rd., Watsons Bay. ✆ **02/9337 4299.**

## MOVIES

The city's major movie houses, **Hoyts** (✆ 13 27 00 in Australia), **Greater Union** (✆ 02/9267 8666), and **Village** (✆ 02/9264 6701), are right next to each other on

George Street just past Town Hall. They tend to show big-budget movie releases. Other options are the **Dendy Cinemas,** 19 Martin Place (✆ 02/9233 8166); 261–263 King St., Newtown (✆ 02/9550 5699); and 2 East Circular Quay, just before you reach the Opera House (✆ 02/9247 3800). All show art-house movies; the Dendy Quay allows wine and beer bought on the premises to be consumed in the cinema. In Paddington, the **Verona,** 17 Oxford St. (✆ 02/9360 6099), and the **Academy Twin,** 2 Oxford St. (✆ 02/9361 4455), conveniently located next to each other, always screen the best local and foreign films in Sydney.

Another exceptional art house and recent-blockbuster cinema is the **Hayden Orpheum Picture Palace,** 380 Military Rd., Cremorne (✆ **02/9908 4344**). This eight-screen Art Deco gem is an experience in itself, especially on Saturday and Sunday evenings when a Wurlitzer pops up from the center of the Cinema 2 stage, and a musician in a tux gives a stirring rendition of times gone by. Eat Jaffas, round candy-coated chocolates, if you want to fit in.

Movie prices are around A$15 (US$12) for a ticket, with half-price night generally on Tuesday.

## THE CASINO

**Star City** This huge entertainment center has 15 bars, 12 restaurants, 2 theaters—the Showroom, which presents Las Vegas–style revues, and the Lyric, Sydney's largest theater—as well as a huge complex of retail shops. All the usual gambling tables are here, in four main areas. In all, there are 2,500 slot machines to gobble your change. You must be over 18 to gamble. Open 24 hours. 80 Pyrmont St., Pyrmont (adjacent to Darling Harbour). ✆ **02/9777 9000.** Ferry: Pyrmont (Darling Harbour). Monorail: Casino.

# 5

# New South Wales

*by Marc Llewellyn*

With so much to experience in a state as big as New South Wales, you're not going to see all the major attractions in one hit, so you must prioritize. If you have just a few days to spare, you should certainly head out to the Blue Mountains, part of the Great Dividing Range that separates the lush eastern coastal strip from the more arid interior. Although these mountains are more like hills, they are spectacular, with tall eucalyptus trees, deep river valleys, waterfalls, and craggy cliffs. Or spend a day in the vineyards of the lower Hunter (also known as the Hunter Valley). If you have a few more days, I recommend heading to Barrington Tops National Park, north of the Hunter, for the rainforest and animals, or down to the pristine beaches of Jervis Bay for gorgeous scenery and great bushwalks.

For longer trips, you can head north toward the Queensland border on the 964km (598-mile) route to Brisbane. You'll pass pretty seaside towns, deserted beaches, and tropical hinterland. Another option is to travel along the south coast 1,032km (640 miles) to Melbourne. Along the way are some of the country's most spectacular beaches, quaint hamlets, opportunities to spot dolphins and whales, and extensive national parks. If you want to experience the Outback, then head west across the Blue Mountains. You are sure to see plenty of kangaroos, emus, reptiles, and giant wedge-tailed eagles. The main Outback destination is the extraordinary opal-mining town of Lightning Ridge, where you can meet some of the most eccentric fair-dinkum (that means "authentic" or "genuine") Aussies you'll come across anywhere.

## EXPLORING THE STATE

**VISITOR INFORMATION** The **Sydney Visitors Centre,** 106 George St., The Rocks (✆ **13 20 77** in Australia, or 02/9240 8788; www.tourism.nsw.gov.au), will give you general information on what to do and accommodations you can afford throughout the state. **Tourism New South Wales** (✆ **02/9931 1111**) will direct you to the regional tourist office in the town or area you are interested in.

**GETTING AROUND** **By Car** From Sydney, the **Pacific Highway** heads along the north coast into Queensland, and the **Princes Highway** hugs the south coast and runs into Victoria. The **Sydney-Newcastle Freeway** connects Sydney with its industrial neighbor and the vineyards of the Hunter. The **Great Western Highway** and the **M4 motorway** head west to the Blue Mountains. The **M5 motorway, Hume Highway,** is the quickest ways to get to Melbourne (via Canberra).

The state's automobile association, the **National Roads and Motorists' Association (NRMA),** 151 Clarence St., Sydney (✆ **13 11 22** in Australia), offers free maps and touring guides to members of overseas motoring associations, including AAA in

the United States, CAA in Canada, AA and RAC in the United Kingdom, and NZAA in New Zealand.

**By Train** **Countrylink** (✆ **13 22 32** in Australia, or 02/8202 2000) trains travel to most places of interest in the state and as far south as Melbourne in Victoria and across the border into southern Queensland. Countrylink also has special rates for car rental through Thrifty.

**By Plane** **Qantas** (✆ **13 13 13** in Australia, or 800/227-4500 in the U.S. and Canada) and **Eastern Australia Airlines** (book through Qantas) fly to most major cities and towns in the state.

## 1 The Blue Mountains ★★

Although the **Blue Mountains** are where Sydneysiders go to escape the humidity and crowds of the city, in the early days of the colony, the mountains kept at bay those who would explore the interior. In 1813, three explorers—Gregory Blaxland, William Charles Wentworth, and William Lawson—managed to conquer the cliffs, valleys, and dense forest, and cross the mountains (which are hardly mountains, but a series of hills covered in bush and ancient fern trees) to the plains beyond. There they found land the colony urgently needed for grazing and farming. The **Great Western Highway** and **Bells Line of Road** are the access roads through the region today—winding and steep in places, they are surrounded by the Blue Mountains and Wollemi national parks.

The area is known for its spectacular scenery, particularly the cliff-top views into the valleys of gum trees and across to craggy outcrops that tower from the valley floor. It's colder up here than down on the plains, and clouds can sweep in and fill the canyons with mist in minutes, while waterfalls cascade down sheer drops, spraying the dripping fern trees that cling to the gullies. You'll need at least a couple of days up here to get the best out of it—a single-day tour, with all the traveling involved, can only just scratch the surface.

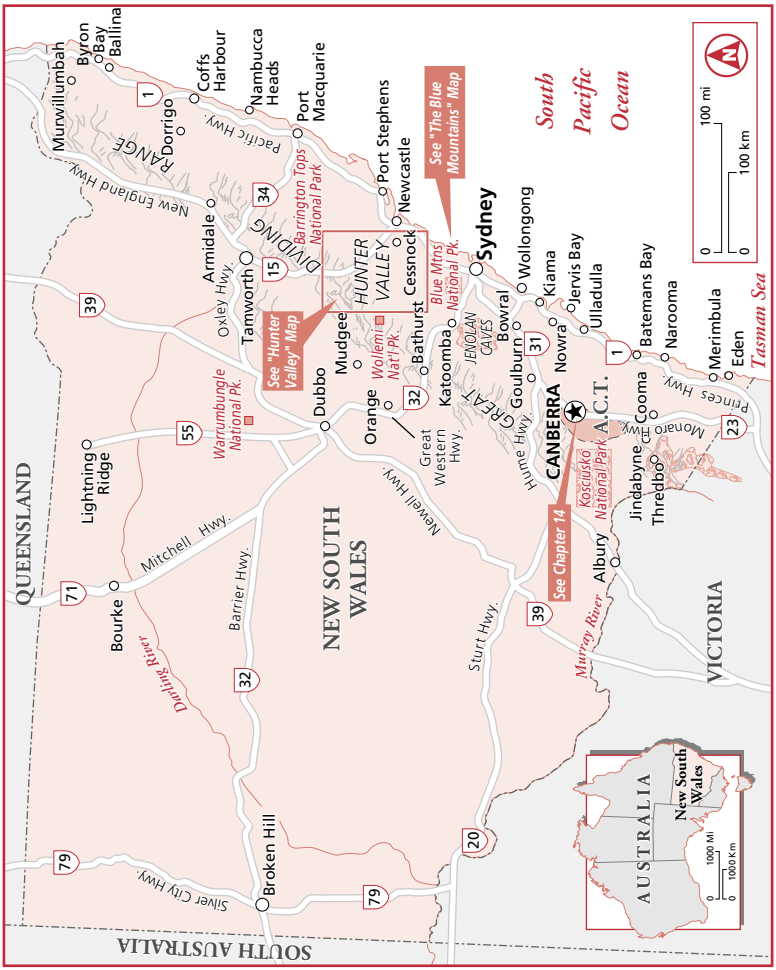
The Blue Mountains are also one of Australia's best-known adventure playgrounds. Rock climbing, caving, abseiling (rappelling), bushwalking, mountain biking, horseback riding, and canoeing are practiced here year-round.

### BLUE MOUNTAIN ESSENTIALS

**VISITOR INFORMATION** You can pick up maps, walking guides, and other information and book accommodations at **Blue Mountains Tourism,** Echo Point Road, Katoomba, NSW 2780 (✆ **1300/653 408** in Australia, or 02/4739 6266), and on the Great Western Highway at Glenbrook, a small settlement 61km (38 miles) from Sydney (same phone). The Katoomba information center is an attraction itself, with glass windows overlooking a gum forest, and cockatoos and lorikeets feeding on seed dispensers. Pick up a copy of the ***Blue Mountains Pocket Guide,*** a free guide to

**Fun Fact Color Me Blue**

The Blue Mountains derive their name from the ever-present blue haze that is caused by light striking the droplets of eucalyptus oil that evaporate from the leaves of the dense surrounding forest.




dining, accommodations, bushwalking, and entertainment. Both offices are open daily from 9am to 5pm (the office at Glenbrook closes at 4:30pm Sat–Sun).

The **National Park Shop,** Blue Mountains Heritage Centre, end of Govetts Leap Road, Blackheath (✆ **02/4787 8877**), is run by the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (www.npws.nsw.gov.au) and offers detailed information about the Blue Mountains National Park. The staff can also arrange personalized guided tours of the mountains. It's open daily from 9am to 4:30pm (closed Dec 25).

Check the www.bluemts.com.au website for more information on the area.

**GUIDED TOURS FROM SYDNEY** Many private bus operators offer day trips from Sydney, but it's important to shop around. Some offer a guided coach tour during which you just stretch your legs occasionally, while others let you get your circulation going with a couple of longish bushwalks. One highly recommended operator

### Tips Timing Is Everything: When to Visit

If you can, try to visit the Blue Mountains on **weekdays,** when most Sydneysiders are at work and prices are lower. Note that the colder winter months (June–Aug) are the busiest season. This period is known as **Yuletide**—the locals' version of the Christmas period, when most places offer traditional Christmas dinners and roaring log fires.

is **Oz Trek Adventure Tours** (✆ **02/9360 3444;** www.oztrek.com.au). Its trips include a tour of the Olympic site, a visit to Glenbrook National Park (where you'll see kangaroos and wallabies in the wild), tours of all the major Blue Mountain sites, and a 1½-hour bushwalk. It costs A$54 (US$43) for adults and A$43 (US$34) for kids. You can add overnight packages, horseback riding, and abseiling.

**Sydney Tours-R-Us** (✆ **02/9498 4084;** sydneytoursrus@yahoo.com.au) runs minicoaches to the Blue Mountains, stopping off at the Telstra Stadium (where the Sydney Olympics were held) and Featherdale Wildlife Park. Then you see all the major sights in the mountains and get to sing Aussie folk music on the way back home. Brochures are all over town. The trip costs A$79 (US$63).

**Visitours** (✆ **02/9909 0822;** www.visitours.com.au) runs a fabulous minibus trip to the mountains, also stopping at Featherdale Wildlife Park and the Olympic site. You get to see all the usual 1-day sights, learn to throw a boomerang and play the didgeridoo, and take a ferry ride down the Parramatta River back to Circular Quay in Sydney. The trip costs A$82 (US$66) with lunch.

**Wonderbus** (✆ **1800/669 800** or 1300/556 357 in Australia, or 02/9555 9800; www.wonderbus.com.au) offers tours that run to the Blue Mountains and also to Jenolan Caves. Trips start at A$155 (US$124) including all admission fees and lunch.

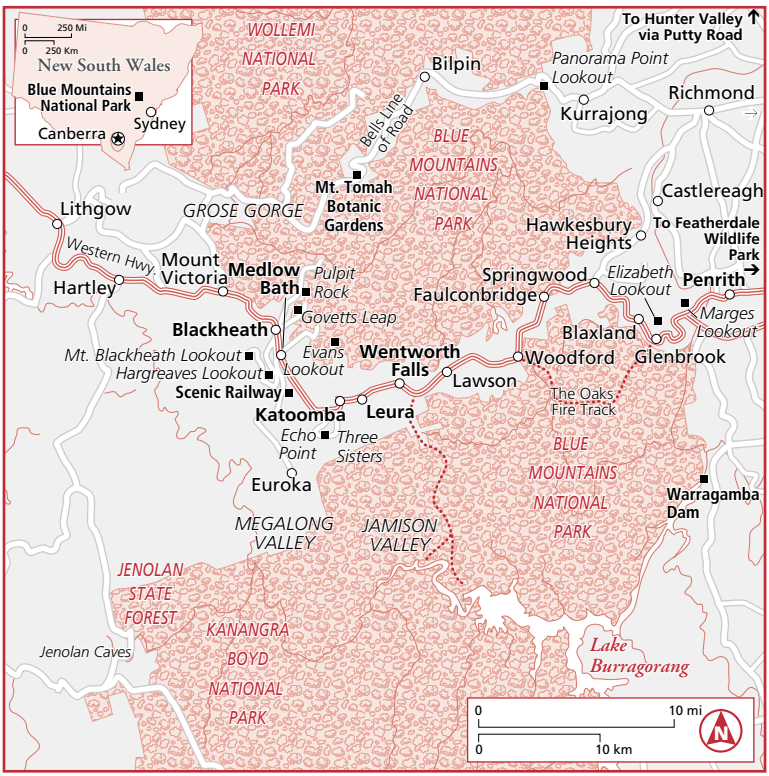
**Line** (✆ **1300/858 687** in Australia, or 03/9663 4455; www.grayline.com) offers several Blue Mountains trips in large coaches from A$100 (US$80) per person. A combined Blue Mountains/Jenolan caves trip costs A$123 (US$98) for adults and A$62 (US$50) for kids. If you hate big-group travel, choose another option.

## BUSHWALKING & OTHER ACTIVE ENDEAVORS

Almost every other activity costs money, but bushwalking (hiking) is the exception to the rule. There are some 50 walking trails in the Blue Mountains, ranging from routes you can cover in 15 minutes to the 3-day **Six Foot Track** ★ that starts outside Katoomba and finishes at Jenolan Caves. If you are planning on some bushwalking, I recommend picking up *Sydney and Beyond—Eighty-Six Walks in NSW* by Andrew Mevissen (Macstyle Publishing). It features eight walks in the Blue Mountains, from easy 1-hour treks to 6-hour tramps. Buy it at local bookshops and tourist information centers. The staff at the tourist offices and national park office will be happy to point you in the right direction, whether it be for an hour's stroll or a full day's hike.

**Great Australian Walks,** 81 Elliot St., Balmain, NSW 2041 (✆ **1300/360 499** in Australia, or 02/9555 7580; www.greatwalks.com.au), is a superb operator offering walks in the Blue Mountains. I had great fun on their 3-day "Six Foot Track Walk" from Katoomba to Jenolan Caves. Though not a wilderness trek, it goes through pockets of rainforest and gum forests and traverses farming country.

One of the best adventure operators in the area, **High 'n' Wild,** Unit 3, 5 Katoomba St., Katoomba, NSW 2780 (✆ **02/4782 6224;** www.high-n-wild.com.au), offers a




series of canyoning expeditions, taking in scenic rainforest gullies and caverns made up of dramatic rock formations and fern-lined walls. There's a bit of swimming and plenty of walking, wading, and squeezing through tight spaces involved—and sometimes rappelling (called "abseiling" in Australia)—but fortunately, being double-jointed is not a prerequisite.

If you want to test your head for heights, try High 'n' Wild's 150m (492-ft.) "Mega Jump"—the highest continuous rappel in the Southern Hemisphere. This heart-pumping descent down a cliff is suitable for the fearless beginner, but the staff assures me you soon settle in by practicing on the 10-story-high junior slopes beforehand.

If that's too much to handle, you could always try a day on an inflatable raft between huge towering rock walls on the Wollangambe River. There are a few minor rapids to navigate, and the bushwalk down to the river and back up again can be a little testing, but it's certainly suitable for a family outing. Prices start at A$69 (US$55) for rappelling and A$85 (US$68) for canyoning. Raft adventures cost A$169 (US$135).

Other excellent adventure operators are the **Blue Mountains Adventure Company,** 84a Bathurst Rd. (P.O. Box 242), Katoomba, NSW 2780 (✆ **02/4782 1271;** bmac@bmac.com.au), located above the Summit Gear Shop; and the **Australian**

**School of Mountaineering,** 166b Katoomba St., Katoomba, NSW 2780 (✆ **02/4782 2014**). Both offer rock climbing, rappelling, and canyoning trips. The Adventure Company also offers caving and mountain biking, and the School of Mountaineering offers bushcraft and survival training. Expect to pay around A$100 (US$80) for a daylong introductory rock-climbing course, including rappelling, and A$99 to A$125 (US$79–US$100) for a day's canyoning.

If you feel like some adventure on your own, you can rent a mountain bike from **Cycletech,** 182 Katoomba St., Katoomba (✆ **02/4782 2800**). Standard mountain bikes cost A$19 (US$15) for half a day and A$28 (US$22) for a full day; superior front-suspension mountain bikes cost A$28 (US$22) for a half-day and A$50 (US$40) for a full day.

## KATOOMBA: GATEWAY TO THE BLUE MOUNTAINS

114km (71 miles) W of Sydney

Katoomba (pop. 11,200) is the largest town in the Blue Mountains and the focal point of the Blue Mountains National Park. It's an easy 1½- to 2-hour trip from Sydney by train, bus, or car. The town is a low-socioeconomic pocket in a very affluent region, with one of the highest unemployment rates in the state.

**GETTING THERE** By car from central Sydney, travel along Parramatta Road and turn off onto the M4 motorway (around 2 hr. to Katoomba). Another route is via the Harbour Bridge to North Sydney, along the Warringah Freeway (following signs to the M2). Then take the M2 to the end and follow signs to the M4 and the Blue Mountains. This takes around 1½ hours.

Frequent rail service connects Sydney to Katoomba from Central Station; contact **CityRail** (✆ **13 15 00**) or **Countrylink** (✆ **13 22 32** in Australia, or 02/8202 2000) for details. The train trip takes 2 hours. Trains leave almost hourly from platform nos. 12 and 13, stopping at Katoomba and then at Mount Victoria and Lithgow. An adult same-day round-trip ticket costs around A$12 (US$10) off-peak, and A$20 (US$16) during commuter hours. A child's ticket costs A$3 (US$2.40).

**GETTING AROUND** The best way to get around the Blue Mountains without your own transport is the **Blue Mountains Explorer Bus** (✆ **02/4782 4807;** www.explorerbus.com.au). The double-decker bus leaves from outside Katoomba train station every hour from 9:30am until 4:30pm and stops at 27 attractions, resorts, galleries, and tearooms in and around Katoomba and Leura. You can get on and off as often as you want. Tickets cost A$25 (US$20) for adults, A$13 (US$10) for children, and A$63 (US$50) for families; prices include discounts on the Scenic Railway and the Skyway (see "Exploring the Area," below), and at some other attractions and restaurants. You can also link this tour bus with the CityRail train from Sydney. The **Blue Mountains Explorer Link Ticket,** available from CityRail stations, includes round-trip train fare and Explorer Bus tickets and costs A$39 (US$31) for adults, A$15 (US$12) for children, and A$62 (US$50) for families.

Another option is **Trolley Tours** (✆ **1800/801 577** in Australia, or 02/4782 3333; www.trolleytours.com.au), which is a kind of tram on wheels with commentary. An all-day pass costs A$12 (US$9.60) and includes stops at various attractions around Katoomba and Leura, too. The trolley leaves Katoomba Station each hour, connecting with the trains from Sydney.

**Fantastic Aussie Tours** (✆ **02/4782 1866;** www.fantastic-aussie-tours.com.au) is based in the Blue Mountains and runs excursions in the area, These include guided

walks from A$39 to A$85 (US$31–US$68); the Rocks and Rainforest tour by four-wheel-drive, costing A$92 (US$74) for adults and A$46 (US$37) for kids; and a basic Blue Mountains tour combined with a trip to Jenolan caves (with admission to one cave). See the "Jenolan Caves" section, later in this chapter.

## ACCOMMODATIONS YOU CAN AFFORD

**The Carrington Hotel** ★★ *Finds* Construction started on this grand Victorian hotel in 1880, and it reopened in 2000 after a major renovation. A ramshackle structure, The Carrington is a must-stay if you're into buildings of the British Raj style. Downstairs are a restaurant and breakfast room (once a ballroom), a couple of lounges with antiques, and a gorgeous wood-paneled billiard room. Chandeliers and 1930s-style lamps reflecting off silver trophies won by the local Rifle Club give everything a warm glow. Unfortunately, heavy Plexiglas doors greet you as you enter each of the many corridors—a necessary fire precaution. All the rooms are delightful, with royal gold and blue carpets and drapes that would probably be gaudy if they didn't fit in with the overall style. Traditional rooms share bathrooms, colonial rooms come with a deep tub in the bathroom (with a noisy fan) and no view to speak of, deluxe colonial rooms have a balcony and mountain views, premier rooms have Jacuzzis and great views, and the suites are fit for a duke and duchess. Dinner here costs A$100 (US$80) per person, and the breakfast is one of the best I've encountered.

15–47 Katoomba St. (P.O. Box 28), Katoomba, NSW 2780. ✆ **02/4782 1111.** Fax 02/4782 1421. www.thecarrington.com.au. 63 units. Traditional double A$119 (US$95) Sun–Thurs, A$139 (US$111) Fri–Sat; colonial double A$170 (US$136) Sun–Thurs, A$190 (US$152) Fri–Sat; deluxe colonial double A$205 (US$164) Sun–Thurs, A$225 (US$180) Fri–Sat; premier double (no view) A$205 (US$164) Sun–Thurs, A$225 (US$180) Fri–Sat; premier double (with view) A$245 (US$196) Sun–Thurs, A$265 (US$212) Fri–Sat; suite A$315–A$445 (US$252–US$356) Sun–Thurs, A$335–A$465 (US$268–US$372) Fri–Sat. Ask about weekend packages. Rates include full breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar. *In room:* TV, coffeemaker, iron.

**Echo Point Holiday Villas** ★ These are the closest self-contained accommodations to the Three Sisters Lookout. The two front-facing villas are the best because of their beautiful mountain views. Some villas have one double and two single beds, plus a foldout double bed in the lounge room. There are barbecue facilities in the backyard. The two cottages are also fully self-contained, sleeping up to eight, and have a tub, central heating, and access to nice gardens.

36 Echo Point Rd., Katoomba, NSW 2780. ✆ **02/4782 3275.** Fax 02/4782 7030. www.echopointvillas.com.au. 5 villas (all with shower only), 2 cottages. Villa A$140 (US$112) Fri–Sat and public holidays, A$110 (US$88) Sun–Thurs; A$160 (US$128) cottage for 2. Cottage 2-night minimum. Extra person A$12 (US$9.60). AE, DC, MC, V. *In room:* TV, kitchen, fridge, hair dryer, iron.

**Katoomba Mountain Lodge** This AAA-rated two-star property is cozy, with rooms looking out across the mountains. Doubles are basic and lack a TV, but are adequate for a couple nights. All share bathrooms. There's a TV lounge with a log fire, a BYO dining room, and a game room. The staff can arrange tour packages.

31 Lurline St., Katoomba, NSW 2780. ✆/fax **02/4782 3933.** www.katoombamountainlodge.com.au. 23 units, none with bathroom. Double A$58 (US$46) Sun–Thurs, A$78 (US$62) Fri–Sat (2-night minimum). Ask about packages. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Game room; tour desk; coin-op laundry. *In room:* No phone.

**Katoomba YHA Hostel** ★★ This wonderful YHA hostel was the winner of the Best Backpacker Accommodation award at the 2004–05 Australian Tourism Awards and the 2004 NSW Tourism Awards. It's set in a former 1930s cabaret club and still retains some of its fun atmosphere. It's very roomy, modern, and friendly, and also well

located in the heart of Katoomba. There's log fire in the living room, a communal kitchen, dining room, games room, reading room, and a television. Also here is a nice balcony and barbecue area. Some double rooms include a set of bunks for kids. The dorm rooms accommodate four to eight people.

207 Katoomba St., Katoomba, NSW 2780. ✆ **02/4782 1416.** Fax 03/4782 6203. www.yha.com.au. 57 rooms (29 double/twin/family rooms). A$64 (US$51) double with shared bathroom, A$72 (US$58) double with private bathroom; A$22–A$24 (US$18–US$19) dorm bed. MC, V. **Amenities:** Bike rental; tour desk; coin-op laundry. *In room:* No phone.

## WHERE TO DINE

**Katoomba Street** has many ethnic dining choices, whether you're hungry for Greek, Chinese, or Thai. Restaurants in the Blue Mountains are generally more expensive than equivalent places in Sydney.

**Chork Dee Thai Restaurant** THAI Loved by the locals, Chork Dee offers good Thai food in a pleasant but modest setting. It serves the usual Thai fare, including satay, spring rolls, and fish cakes to start, followed by lots of curries, noodles, and sweet-and-sour dishes. While vegetarians won't find any starters without meat or fish, plenty of veggie and tofu dishes are available as main courses. BYO.

216 Katoomba St. ✆ **02/4782 1913.** Main courses A$7.70–A$17 (US$6.15–US$14). AE, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 5:30–9pm; Fri–Sat 5:30–10pm.

**Lindsay's** ★★ INTERNATIONAL Swiss chef Beat Ettlin has been making waves in Katoomba ever since he left some of the best European restaurants behind to try his hand at dishes such as pan-fried crocodile nibbles on pumpkin scones with ginger dipping sauce. The food in this upscale, New York–style speakeasy is as glorious as its decor—Tiffany lamps, sketches by Australian artist Norman Lindsay, and booths lining the walls. The three-level restaurant is warmed by a cozy fire surrounded by an antique lounge stage and resounds every night to piano, classical music, or a jazz band. The menu changes every few weeks, but a recent popular dish was grilled veal medallions topped with Balmain bugs (small, saltwater crayfish), with potato and béarnaise sauce.

122 Katoomba St. ✆ **02/4782 2753.** Reservations recommended. Main courses A$14–A$24 (US$11–US$19). AE, MC, V. Wed–Sun 6pm–midnight.

**Paragon Café** *Value* CAFE The Paragon has been a Blue Mountains institution since it opened for business in 1916. Inside, it's decked out with dark wood paneling, bas-relief figures guarding the booths, and chandeliers. The homemade soups are delicious. The cafe also serves pies, pastas, grills, seafood, waffles, cakes, and a Devonshire tea of scones and cream.

65 Katoomba St. ✆ **02/4782 2928.** Menu items A$3–A$10 (US$2.40–US$8). AE, MC, V. Tues–Fri 10am–3:30pm; Sat–Sun 10am–4pm.

**TrisElies** GREEK Perhaps it's the belly dancers, the plate smashing, or the smell of moussaka, but as soon as you walk through the door of this lively eatery you feel as if you've been transported to an authentic Athenian *taberna.* The restaurant folds out onto three tiers of tables, all with a good view of the stage where Greek or international performances take place every night. The food is solid Greek fare—souvlaki, traditional dips, fried *haloumi* cheese, Greek salads, casseroles like Mother could have made, whitebait (tiny fried fish), and sausages in red wine—with a few Italian and Spanish extras. In winter, warm up beside one of two log fires.

287 Bathurst Rd. ✆ **02/4782 4026.** Fax 02/4782 1128. www.triselies.com.au. Reservations recommended. Main courses A$17–A$26 (US$14–US$21). AE, DC, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 5pm–midnight; Fri–Sat 5pm–3am.

## EXPLORING THE AREA

The most visited and photographed attractions in the Blue Mountains are the rock formations known as the **Three Sisters** ★★. For the best vantage point, head to **Echo Point Road,** across from the Blue Mountains Tourism office. Or try Evans Lookout, Govetts Leap, and Hargreaves Lookout, all at Blackheath (see "Blackheath," below)—none of which is on the Blue Mountains Explorer Bus or Trolley Tours route.

One thing you have to do in the Blue Mountains is ride **Scenic World's Scenic Railway,** the world's steepest—follow the road signs to Scenic World. It consists of a carriage on rails that is lowered 415m (1,361 ft.) into the Jamison Valley at a maximum incline of 52 degrees. It's *very* steep and quite a thrill. Originally the rail line was used to transport coal and shale from the mines below in the 1880s. The trip takes only a few minutes; at the bottom are some excellent walks through forests of ancient tree ferns. Another popular attraction is the **Skyway,** a cable car that travels 300m (984 ft.) above the Jamison Valley. The round-trip takes 6 minutes. The Scenic Railway and the Skyway (✆ **02/4782 2699;** www.scenicworld.com.au) each cost A$14 (US$11) round-trip for adults, A$7 (US$5.60) for children, and A$35 (US$28) for families. They operate from 9am to 5pm daily (last trip at 4:50pm). They depart from the ticket office at 1 Violet St., Katoomba. (Follow the signs.) I'd advise taking the Scenic railway down, going for a walk, and taking the cable car back up.

Canyons, waterfalls, underground rivers—the Blue Mountains has them all, and before you experience them in person you can catch them on the (giant) screen at the **MAXVISION Cinema,** 225–237 Great Western Hwy., Katoomba (✆ **02/4782 8900**). The special effects shown on the screen, 18m (59 ft.) high and 24m (79 ft.) wide, make you feel like you're part of the action. At the time of writing, the 38-minute film *The Edge* was being shown every day at 10:20, 11:05am, 12:10, 1:30, 2:13, and 5:30pm. It would be worth ringing ahead as these times seem to change from time to time. Tickets cost A$13 (US$10) for adults, A$11 (US$8.80) for students, and A$7.50 (US$6) for children. The cinema is a 5- to 10-minute walk from the train station. Recently released movies play part of the giant screen in the evening. A restaurant and a snack bar are on the premises.

To get back to Sydney, I highly recommend taking the Bells Line of Road through Bilpin. This route takes up to 3 hours, but you can stop off at the wonderful **Mount Tomah Botanic Gardens** ★. (You can't miss the large sign on your right about 10 min. before you get to Bilpin.) An adjunct of the Royal Botanic Gardens in Sydney, Mount Tomah is dedicated to cold-climate plants. It's compact and has a very good cafe serving lunch daily. Allow around 2 hours for a stop here.

### *Tips* Seeing the Blue Mountains from the Back of a Harley

A thrilling way to see the Blue Mountains is on the back of a Harley-Davidson. **Blue Thunder Bike Tours** (✆ **1800/800 184** in NSW, or 0408/618 982 mobile; www.bluethunder.com.au) provides the biker and leaves from Manly Wharf in Sydney (but will pick you up anywhere in the city). Rides cost A$345 (US$276) for a full day with lunch to the Blue Mountains. The company offers cheaper Sydney rides, too.

## LEURA

107km (66 miles) W of Sydney; 3km (2 miles) E of Katoomba

The fashionable capital of the Blue Mountains, Leura is known for its gardens, its attractive old buildings (many holiday homes for Sydneysiders), and its cafes and restaurants. The National Trust has classified Leura's main street as an urban conservation area. Just outside Leura is the **Sublime Point Lookout,** which has spectacular views of the Three Sisters in Katoomba. From the southern end of **Leura Mall,** a cliff drive takes you all the way back to Echo Point in Katoomba; along the way you'll enjoy spectacular views across the Jamison Valley.

## WENTWORTH FALLS ★★

103km (64 miles) W of Sydney; 7km (4½ miles) E of Katoomba

This pretty town has numerous crafts and antiques shops, but the area is principally known for its 281m (922-ft.) waterfall, in **Falls Reserve.** On the far side of the falls is the **National Pass Walk**—one of the best in the Blue Mountains. It's cut into a cliff face with overhanging rock faces on one side and sheer drops on the other. The views over the Jamison Valley are spectacular. The track takes you down to the base of the falls to the **Valley of the Waters.**

### A NICE SPOT FOR LUNCH

**Conservation Hut Café** CAFE This pleasant cafe is in the national park on top of a cliff overlooking the Jamison Valley. It's a good place for a bit of lunch on the balcony after the Valley of the Waters walk, which leaves from outside. It serves the usual cafe fare—burgers, salads, sandwiches, and pastas—and vegetarian options, too. There's a nice log fire inside in winter.

At the end of Fletcher St., Wentworth Falls. ✆ **02/4757 3827.** Menu items A$6–A$15 (US$4.80–US$12). AE, MC, V. Daily 9am–5pm.

## MEDLOW BATH

150km (93 miles) W of Sydney; 6km (3¾ miles) NW of Katoomba

Between Katoomba and Blackheath, Medlow Bath is a cozy place, with its own railway station, a secondhand bookstore, and a few properties hidden between the trees. Its one claim to fame is the **Hydro Majestic Hotel** (✆ **02/4788 1002**), a must-do stop for any visitor to the Blue Mountains. The historic Hydro Majestic has fabulous views over the Megalong Valley; the best time to appreciate the views is at sunset with a drink on the terrace. Otherwise, it sells Devonshire tea all day and plenty of cakes, snacks, coffee, and tea.

## BLACKHEATH

114km (71 miles) W of Sydney; 14km (8¾ miles) NW of Katoomba

Blackheath is the highest town in the Blue Mountains at 1,049m (3,441 ft.). The **Three Brothers** at Blackheath are not as big or as famous as the Three Sisters in Katoomba, but you can climb two of them for fabulous views. Or you could try the **Cliff Walk** from **Evans Lookout** to **Govetts Leap** (named after a surveyor who mapped the region in the 1830s), where there are magnificent views over the **Grose Valley** and **Bridal Veil Falls.** The 1½-hour tramp passes through banksia, gum, and wattle forests, with spectacular views of peaks and valleys. If you want a guide in the area, contact **Blue Mountains Magic** (✆ **02/4787 6354;** www.bluemts.com.au), based in Blackheath. The guide, Phil Foster, is a trained botanist. Blackheath has some interesting tearooms and antiques shops.

**GETTING THERE** The Great Western Highway takes motorists from Katoomba to Blackheath. CityRail trains also stop at Blackheath.

**VISITOR INFORMATION** The **Blue Mountains Heritage Centre** (✆ **02/4787 8877;** bluemountains.heritagecentre@npws.nsw.gov.au), operated by the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (www.npws.nsw.gov.au), is close to Govetts Leap Lookout on Govetts Leap Road. It has information on guided walks, camping, and hiking, as well as information on local European and Aboriginal historic sites. It's open daily from 9am to 4:30pm.

### AN INTERESTING PLACE TO STAY

**Jemby-Rinjah Lodge** ★ The Blue Mountains National Park is a short walk away from this interesting accommodations option. There are nine standard cabins (seven two-bedroom cabins and two one-bedroom loft cabins), one deluxe cabin called Treetops Retreat, and three pole-frame lodges good for groups. The well-spaced cabins are right in the bush and can sleep up to six people. Each has a slow-combustion heater, carpets, a bathroom, a fully equipped kitchen, and a lounge and dining area. There are laundry and barbecue areas nearby. The lodges have five bedrooms, two bathrooms, and a common lounge area with a circular fireplace. You can rent linens, but bring your own food. Free pickup can be arranged from Blackheath train station. Treetops Retreat has a Japanese hot tub, TV, VCR, stereo, and three private balconies with bush views. It sleeps two, making it a perfect romantic getaway. The nearby walking trails take you to the spectacular Grand Canyon; the Grose Valley Blue Gum forests; and Walls Cave, a resting place for local Aborigines 10,000 years ago.

336 Evans Lookout Rd., Blackheath, NSW 2785. ✆ **02/4787 7622.** Fax 02/4787 6230. www.jembyrinjahlodge.com.au. 10 cabins, 3 lodges. Standard 1- and 2-bedroom cabins A$150 (US$120) Mon–Thurs, A$199 (US$159) Fri–Sun; deluxe cabins A$199 (US$159) Mon–Thurs, A$250 (US$200) Fri–Sun; Ecolodges (8 adults/group booking) A$79 (US$63) per person Mon–Thurs, A$95 (US$76) per person Fri–Sun. Extra adult A$30 (US$24), extra child A$22 (US$18). Linens A$14 (US$11) per bed. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant w/lounge area; coin-op laundry; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* TV, kitchenette, fridge, coffeemaker.

### EXPLORING THE AREA ON HORSEBACK

One of the nicest ways to get around is on horseback. **Werriberri Trail Rides** (✆ **02/4787 9171;** fax 02/4787 6680), at the base of the Blue Mountains, 10km (6 miles) from Blackheath on Megalong Road in the Megalong Valley, offers guided multiday rides. They are suitable for beginners to advanced riders.

## JENOLAN CAVES ★

182km (113 miles) W of Sydney; 70km (43 miles) SW of Katoomba

The winding road from Katoomba eventually takes you to a spur of the Great Dividing Range and a series of underground limestone caves considered some of the world's best. Known to the local Aborigines as Binoomea, meaning "dark place," the caves are an impressive amalgamation of stalactites, stalagmites, and underground rivers and pools. They have been open to the public since 1866.

**GETTING THERE** It's a 1½-hour drive from Katoomba to the caves. CityRail trains run to Katoomba and link up with daily Jenolan Caves excursions run by **Fantastic Aussie Tours** (✆ **02/4782 1866,** or 1300/300 915 in Sydney; www.fantastic-aussie-tours.com.au). The day tour departs Katoomba at 10:30am and returns at 5:15pm. It costs A$75 (US$60) for adults, A$38 (US$30) for children, and A$200 (US$160) for families. The company also runs transfers to Jenolan from Katoomba,

departing at 10:30am and leaving Jenolan at 3:45pm daily. They cost A$85 (US$68) for adults and A$43 (US$34) for kids. The company can transfer you to Jenolan Caves for A$50 (US$40) for adults and A$25 (US$20) for kids. Ask about family fares.

### ACCOMMODATIONS YOU CAN AFFORD

**The Gatehouse Jenolan** The Gatehouse is a cozy budget-style lodge with a separate cottage nearby. It's opposite the caves. The Gatehouse sleeps 66 people in all, in seven six-bed rooms and six four-bed rooms in the main building. The cottage can accommodate up to four couples. There are two common rooms, lockers, washing machines and dryers, and kitchen facilities. There are outdoor barbecues on the premises and apparently at least one ghost.

Jenolan Caves Village, NSW 2790. ✆ **02/6359 3322.** Fax 02/6359 3227. 13 units, 1 cottage. Weekend A$90 (US$72) 4-person dorm room; A$120 (US$96) 6-person dorm room; A$121 (US$97) cottage. Weekday A$60 (US$48) 4-person dorm room, A$80 (US$64) 6-person dorm room; A$89 (US$71) cottage. Linen A$3.30 (US$2.65) per person. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Coin-op laundry.

**Jenolan Caves House** ★ This heritage-listed hotel built between 1888 and 1906 is one of the most outstanding structures in New South Wales. The main part of the enormous three-story building is made of sandstone and fashioned in Tudor-style black and white. Around it are several cottages and former servants' quarters. Accommodations within the main house vary, from simple "traditional" rooms with shared bathrooms to "classic" rooms with private bathrooms. The traditional and classic rooms are old-world and cozy, with heavy furniture and views over red-tile rooftops or steep slopes. Classic rooms have views of Jenolan Caves Valley and gardens; "grand classic" rooms have spectacular views across the hills and countryside. "Mountain lodge" rooms, in a building behind the main house, are more motel-like. The two-night weekend rates show why you should avoid this place on weekends.

Jenolan Caves Village, NSW 2790. ✆ **02/6359 3322.** Fax 02/6359 3227. www.jenolancaves.com. 101 units, 87 with bathroom. A$190–A$250 (US$152–US$200) traditional double; A$280–A$380 (US$224–US$304) classic double; A$330–A$450 (US$264–US$360) grand classic double; A$370–A$450 (US$296–US$360) classic suites; A$400–A$560 (US$320–US$448) grand classic suites. A$210–A$280 (US$168–US$224) mountain lodge double. Higher rates are for Fri–Sun and public holidays. Two-night minimum on weekends. All rates include dinner. Extra person A$60 (US$48). AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; bar; tour desk; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* TV, coffeemaker, hair dryer.

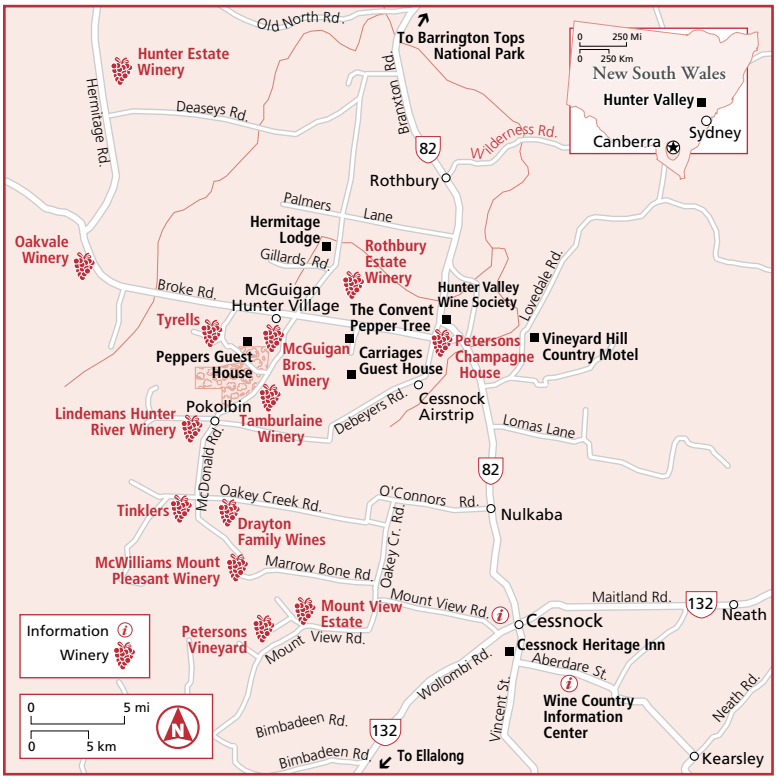
### EXPLORING THE CAVES

Nine caves are open for exploration, with guided tours operated by **Jenolan Caves Reserves Trust** (✆ **02/6359 3311;** www.jenolancaves.org.au). The first tour starts at 10am weekdays and 9:30am weekends and holidays. The final one departs at 4:30pm (5pm in warmer months). Tours last 1 to 2 hours and cost A$15 to A$22 (US$12–US$18) for adults, A$10 to A$15 (US$8–US$12) for children under 15. Family rates and multiple cave packages are available. The best all-around cave is **Lucas Cave; Imperial Cave** is best for seniors. Adventure Cave Tours, which include canyoning, last from 3 hours to a full day and cost A$55 to A$188 (US$44–US$150).

## 2 The Hunter Valley: Wine Tasting & More ★

Cessnock: 190km (118 miles) N of Sydney

The Hunter Valley (or "the Hunter," as it's also called) is the oldest commercial wine-producing area in Australia, as well as a major site for coal mining. Internationally acclaimed wines have poured out of the Hunter since the early 1800s. Though the




region falls behind the major wine-producing areas of Victoria in terms of volume, it has the advantage of being just 2 hours from Sydney.

People come here to visit the vineyards' "cellar doors" for free wine tasting, to enjoy the scenery, to sample the area's highly regarded cuisine, or to escape from the city for a romantic weekend. The whole area is dedicated to the grape and the plate, and you'll find many superb restaurants amid the vineyards and farmland.

In the **Lower Hunter,** around the towns of Cessnock and Pokolbin, are about 110 wineries and cellar doors, including well-known producers such as Tyrell, Rothbury, Lindemans, Draytons, McGuigans, and McWilliams. Many varieties are produced here, including semillon, shiraz, chardonnay, cabernet sauvignon, and pinot noir.

Farther north, the **Upper Hunter** represents the very essence of Australian rural life, with its sheep and cattle farms, historic homesteads, more wineries, and rugged bushland. The vineyards here tend to be larger than those in the south, and they produce more aromatic varieties, such as traminers and Rieslings. February through March is harvest time.

The Upper Hunter gives way to the forested heights of the World Heritage–listed Barrington Tops National Park. The ruggedly beautiful park is home to some of the highest Antarctic beech trees in the country. It abounds with animals, including several marsupial species and a profusion of birds.

### Tips A Wine-Buying Tip

The best years for red wines in this part of Australia were 1998 and 2000, and 2004 when long, hot summers produced fewer but more intensely flavored grapes. Stock up on anything you can find from those vintages. At the other end, 1997 was a bad year, and 1996, 1999, 2001, and 2002 produced average vintages. The year 2003 was good, but not as outstanding as 1998, 2000, and 2004.

## HUNTER VALLEY ESSENTIALS

**GETTING THERE** To get to the wine-producing regions of the Hunter, leave Sydney by the Harbour Bridge or Harbour Tunnel and follow the signs for Newcastle. Just before Hornsby, turn off the highway and head up the National 1/F3 Freeway. After around an hour, take the Cessnock exit and follow signs to the vineyards. The trip will take about 2½ hours. Barrington Tops National Park is reached via the Upper Hunter town of Dungog.

A rental car should cost at least A$45 (US$36) a day from Sydney, and you might put in around A$40 (US$32) worth of gas for a couple of days of touring (the price hovers around A$1 a liter, or US$3 a gallon). In the Hunter, contact **Hertz,** 1A Aberdare Rd., Cessnock (✆ **13 30 39** in Australia, or 02/4991 2500).

**ORGANIZED TRIPS FROM SYDNEY** Several companies offer **day trips** to the Hunter Valley from Sydney.

**Visitours** (✆ **02/9909 0822;** www.visitours.com.au) takes small groups to the Hunter to visit up to six wineries as well as cheese and fudge producers. The trip costs A$85 (US$68), or A$95 (US$76) with lunch.

**Gray Line** (✆ **1300/858 687** or 03/9663 4455; www.grayline.com.au) offers coach trips to the vineyards every Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday, and Sunday costing A$152 (US$121) for adults and A$76 (US$61) for kids. It visits three wineries and includes lunch at McWilliams Mount Pleasant Winery.

**VISITOR INFORMATION** **Wine Country Visitors Information Centre,** Main Road, Pokolbin, NSW 2325 (✆ **02/4990 4477;** fax 02/4991 4518; www.winecountry.com.au), is open Monday through Friday from 9am to 5pm, Saturday from 9:30am to 5pm, and Sunday from 9:30am to 3:30pm. The staff can make accommodations bookings and answer any questions. The **Dungog Visitors Information Centre,** Dowling Street, Dungog (✆ **02/4992 2212**), has plenty of information on the Barrington Tops area. A good general website is www.winecountry.com.au.

## ACCOMMODATIONS YOU CAN AFFORD

The Hunter Valley is far more expensive on weekends and during public holidays than on weekdays. Room prices jump significantly, and some properties insist on a 2-night stay. It's worth checking out the information board in the Wine Country Visitors Information Centre (see "Visitor Information," above) for special deals, including self-contained accommodations, cottages, resorts, and guesthouses.

### IN CESSNOCK

Staying in Cessnock is a good idea if you don't have a car and are relying on local tour companies to pick you up and show you around the area.

**Cessnock Heritage Inn** This 1920s building, built as a pub, is right in the center of Cessnock, so there's easy access to pubs and restaurants. All the rooms are done in country style, with dried grasses, floral bedspreads, and the like. All are quite large, with high ceilings, but differ greatly—the smallest room has a double bed, others have queen-size beds and singles, and there are two family rooms (sleeping five). There's a guest lounge where you can chat with the owners.

Vincent St. (P.O. Box 714), Cessnock, NSW 2325. ✆ **02/4991 2744.** Fax 02/4991 2720. www.hunterweb.com.au/heritageinn.html. 13 units. Weekend A$120 (US$96) double; A$200 (US$160) 2-night package. Weekday A$90 (US$72) double. Rates include breakfast. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Tour desk; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/free videos, minibar, coffeemaker, ceiling fan.

## IN POKOLBIN

**Vineyard Hill Country Motel** ★ Motel is a bit of a misnomer for this place; it's more aptly described as a fully self-contained chalet. Units are modern, with a separate bedroom, a lounge and dining area, a full kitchen, and a balcony with views across a valley of vineyards to the Brokenback Ranges in the distance. It's all terrifically rural, with cows wandering about and kangaroos and possums creeping around at dusk. There's no restaurant, but there is a gourmet deli on the premises. In the garden are a large pool and a Jacuzzi.

Lovedale Rd., Pokolbin, NSW 2321. ✆ **02/4990 4166.** Fax 02/4991 4431. www.vineyardhill.com.au. 8 units. Weekend A$155 (US$124) 1-bedroom unit; A$218 (US$174) 2-bedroom unit for 4. Weekday A$107 (US$86) 1-bedroom unit; A$165 (US$132) 2-bedroom unit. Extra person A$20 (US$16). Ask about weekday and long-weekend packages. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Large heated outdoor pool; Jacuzzi; limited room service; massage; babysitting; free laundry service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, kitchen, minibar, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

### Worth a Splurge

**Carriages Guest House** ★★ Tucked away on 15 hectares (37 acres), a kilometer off the main road, Carriages is a retreat in the heart of Pokolbin. A two-suite cottage, the Gatehouse, is on a separate part of the grounds. In the main two-story house, a veranda circles downstairs rooms, which are furnished in antique country pine. Upstairs, the two gable suites center on huge fireplaces. The Gatehouse suites offer

### Tips Bunking Down in a Caravan, Man

Two trailer (caravan) parks offer reasonably comfortable accommodations in trailers and cabins. **Cessnock Cabins and Caravan Park** (✆ **02/4990 5819;** fax 02/4991 2944), Allandale/Branxton Road, Nulkaba (2km/1¼ miles north of Cessnock), has four on-site vans for A$30 to A$40 (US$24–US$32) and a double and 12 cabins with shower for A$48 to A$69 (US$38–US$55)—the more expensive prices for weekends. There are also camping sites for A$14 (US$11) and powered sites for A$16 (US$13).

The **Valley Vineyard Tourist Park** (✆/fax **02/4990 2573**) on Mount View Road (on the way to the vineyards) has five trailers for A$35 (US$28) and 12 cabins with shower for A$55 (US$44). Two two-bedroom units cost A$75 (US$60). Powered sites cost A$16 to A$20 (US$13–US$16), and a camping site goes for A$12 (US$9.60). A BYO restaurant, a campers' kitchen, and a pool are on-site.

incredible luxury; although relatively new, the stained-glass windows and rescued timber give them a rustic feel (these two Jacuzzi rooms share a lounge with a full kitchen and an open fire). There are open fires in six of the rooms. (The two standard doubles don't have them.) Breakfast is served in your room, and Robert's Restaurant is next door. The friendly owner, Ben Dawson, assures me he'll take Frommer's readers up to the top of a nearby hill where they can see plenty of wild kangaroos.

Halls Rd., Pokolbin, NSW 2321. ✆ **02/4998 7591.** Fax 02/4998 7839. www.thecarriages.com.au. 10 units. A$185 (US$148) double; A$240–A$265 (US$192–US$212) suite; A$285 (US$228) Jacuzzi suite. Rates include breakfast. 2-night minimum on weekends. Ask about 10%–20% discounts weekdays. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Large heated outdoor pool; outdoor lighted tennis court; Jacuzzi; massage; babysitting; laundry service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, kitchenette, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

### IN THE UPPER HUNTER

**Barrington Guest House** ★ Barrington Guest House is in a valley just outside the Barrington Tops National Park, 1½ hours from the main Hunter wine region. It retains an old-world charm and serves bacon and eggs for breakfast, scones and cream, and vegetables boiled soft enough for your dentures. The place has lace tablecloths in the dining room, a log fire beneath a higgledy-piggledy brick chimney, mahogany walls, high ceilings, and personalized service—despite the communal mealtimes and the lack of a menu. Rooms come with or without private bathroom; they're basic (no TV) but comfortable enough, and can be noisy if a party's in full swing in the dining room. This place is very popular with older travelers during the week but appeals to a range of ages on weekends. The guesthouse grounds attract plenty of animals and act as a wildlife reserve for several rescued kangaroos. Activities include horseback riding, guided walks through the rainforest, "billy tea" tours, night spotting for quolls (native cats) and possums, bush dancing, tennis, film evenings, and skeet shooting. It can be a very social scene, too.

Salisbury (3½ hr. from Sydney), NSW 2420. ✆ **02/4995 3212.** Fax 02/4995 3248. www.barringtonguesthouse.com.au. 21 guesthouse units, 13 with bathroom. Weekend A$240 (US$192) double without bathroom; A$345 (US$276) double with bathroom. Weekday A$190 (US$152) double without bathroom; A$280 (US$224) double with bathroom. Rates include meals and activities. 2-night minimum on weekends. Ask about packages and child rates. AE, DC, MC, V. Free pickup from Dungog railway station. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; 2 lit tennis courts; tour desk; massage; laundry service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* Cottages only: TV, kitchen, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

## WHERE TO DINE

### IN CESSNOCK

**Amicos** MEXICAN/ITALIAN/PIZZA You can't mistake the Mexican influence in the decor—bunches of chile peppers, cow skulls, masks, and frescoes—but the Mediterranean/Italian connection is more evident in the menu. Mexican dishes include the usual nachos, enchiladas, burritos, barbecued chicken, and the like, and there are a few pastas and Mediterranean dishes, such as crumbed lamb brains. The pizzas are good, and one could just about serve four people. The restaurant will deliver, too.

138 Wollombi Rd. ✆ **02/4991 1995.** Fax 02/4990 9302. Reservations recommended. Main courses A$12–A$20 (US$9.60–US$16); pizzas A$14–A$18 (US$11–US$14). MC, V. Daily 6–10pm.

### IN POKOLBIN

**Blaxland's Restaurant** ★ MODERN INTERNATIONAL This atmospheric restaurant revolves around a winery theme, with pictures of vineyards on the walls, one of the most comprehensive Hunter wine lists in the area, and the owner's homemade vintages on the menu. Parts of the building date from 1829, with wooden

trusses holding up the ceiling and exposed sandstone block walls. Popular dishes include roast spatchcock (baby chicken) and steamed *balcak* mussels. A large open fire brings a glow to the white tablecloths in winter.

Broke Rd. ✆ **02/4998 7550.** Fax 02/4998 7802. www.blaxlandsrestaurant.com.au. Reservations recommended. Main courses A$20–A$26 (US$16–US$21). A$3 (US$2.40) per person surcharge weekends and public holidays. AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11am–10pm.

**Café Enzo** MODERN AUSTRALIAN This charming cafe offers a nice ambience and good cuisine. Pastas, *pizzettas,* antipasti, and steaks dominate the menu. The *pizzetta* with chargrilled baby octopus, squid, king prawns, Kalamata olives, fresh chile, onion, and Parmesan is particularly nice. Cakes and cheese plates are a specialty.

At the corner of Broke and Ekerts roads (adjacent to Peppers Creek Antiques, near Peppers Guest House). ✆ **02/4998 7233.** Main courses A$10–A$18 (US$8–US$14); Devonshire tea A$7.50 (US$6). AE, DC, MC, V. Wed–Fri and Sun 10am–5pm; Sat 10am–10pm.

**Casuarina Restaurant** ★★ MODERN AUSTRALIAN This superb restaurant has taken a slew of awards in recent years. The surroundings are elegant, with lots of antiques below the very high wooden ceilings. Flambés are the signature meal here, the most popular being a flambé of chile lobster and prawn (for two people). Other dishes to write home about are Thai-style chicken curry and Caesar salad.

In Casuarina Restaurant and Country Inn, Hermitage Rd. ✆ **02/4998 7888.** Fax 02/4998 7692. www.casuarina.com. Reservations recommended. Main courses A$27–A$34 (US$22–US$27). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 7–11pm.

## VISITING THE WINERIES

Many people start their journey through the Hunter by popping into the **Hunter Valley Wine Society,** at the corner of Broke and Branxton roads, Pokolbin (✆ **1300/303 307** in Australia, or 02/4941 3000). The club basically acts as a Hunter Valley wine clearinghouse, sending bottles and cases to members all over Australia, and some overseas. It's also a good place to talk to experts about the area's wines and to taste a few of them. It's open daily from 9am to 5pm.

You might also like to visit the **Small Winemakers Centre,** McDonalds Road, Pokolbin (✆ **02/4998 7668**). At any one time it represents around six of the region's smaller producers.

Most of the wineries in the region are open for cellar-door tastings, and it's perfectly acceptable just to turn up, taste a couple of wines or more, and then say your goodbyes without buying anything. Though you will come across some unusual vintages, especially at the boutique wineries, don't expect to find any bargains—city bottle shops buy in bulk and at trade price, which means you can probably get the same bottle of wine for less in Sydney than at the cellar door in the Hunter.

If you're not traveling by car, see the following section for information about day tours of the wineries.

**Drayton Family Wines** Drayton's produces some spectacular shiraz. Open Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm, Saturday to Sunday 10am to 5pm. Oakey Creek Rd., Pokolbin. ✆ **02/4998 7513.**

**Hunter Estate Winery** The Hunter's largest winery crushes some 6,500 tons of grapes a year. Come here for excellent semillon and shiraz. Open daily 10am to 5pm. Hermitage Rd., Pokolbin. ✆ **02/4998 7777.** Free tours daily 11am and 2pm.

### Tips A Wine-Tasting Tip

Some wineries routinely offer some of their inferior wines for tastings. I've made a habit of asking for a list of their premium wines available for tasting. Most wineries usually have a bottle or two of their better wines uncorked for those with a serious interest.

**Lindemans Hunter River Winery** This famous winery offers an interesting sparkling red shiraz. Open Monday to Friday 9am to 4:30pm, Saturday to Sunday 10am to 4:30pm. McDonald Rd., Pokolbin. ✆ **02/4998 7684.**

**McGuigan Brothers Winery** A winery worth visiting, McGuigan Brothers also has a cheese factory and bakery on the site. Open daily 9:30am to 5pm. McDonald Rd., Pokolbin. ✆ **02/4998 7402.** Tours daily at noon.

**McWilliams Mount Pleasant Winery** Famous for its Elizabeth Semillon, which has won 39 trophies and 214 gold medals since 1981, and its Lovedale Semillon, which has won 39 trophies and 74 gold medals since 1984. Open daily 10am to 4:30pm. Marrowbone Rd., Pokolbin. ✆ **02/4998 7505.** Free tours daily 11am.

**Mount View Estate** The Australian pioneer of Verdelho wines—a grape attributed to Portugal, also grown in small quantities in Italy and France. It's a very crisp and dry white wine, which I like with seafood. Open daily 10am to 5pm. Mount View Rd., Mount View. ✆ **02/4990 3307.**

**Peterson's Champagne House** This is the only specialist champagne winery in the Hunter. Open daily 9am to 5pm. At the corner of Broke and Branxton roads, Pokolbin. ✆ **02/4998 7881.**

**Peterson's Vineyard** Peterson's produces fine chardonnay, semillon, and shiraz. Open Monday to Saturday 9am to 5pm, Sunday 10am to 5pm. Mount View Rd., Mount View. ✆ **02/4990 1704.**

**Rothbury Estate** ★ This very friendly winery produces the magnificent Brokenback Shiraz and the nice Mudgee Shiraz. Open daily 9:30am to 4:30pm. Broke Rd., Pokolbin. ✆ **02/4998 7555.**

**Tamburlaine Winery** Don't miss this boutique winery, the winner of many wine and tourism awards. Open daily 9:30am to 5pm. McDonald Rd., Pokolbin. ✆ **02/4998 7570.**

**Tinklers** If you want to taste grapes in season, head to Tinklers. It sells some 30 different varieties of eating grapes between December and March, and nectarines, plums, peaches, and vegetables at other times of the year. It also offers wine tasting and free vineyard walks at 11am Saturday and Sunday. Open daily 10am to 4pm. Pokolbin Mountains Rd., Pokolbin. ✆ **02/4998 7435.**

**Tyrell's** Tyrell's has produced some famous wines and exports all over the world. Broke Rd., Pokolbin. ✆ **02/4993 7000.** Free tours daily 1:30pm.

## DAY TOURS, HOT-AIR BALLOON RIDES & OTHER FUN STUFF

If you don't have a car, you'll have to get around as part of a tour because no public transport runs between the wineries.

**Trekabout Tours** (✆ **02/4990 8277**) offers half-day and full-day winery tours for a maximum of six people. Half-day tours cost A$28 (US$22), with visits to five or six

wineries; full-day tours cost A$44 (US$35) and take in up to nine wineries. The company can pick you up from your hotel in Cessnock or Pokolbin.

Also offering local pickup is **Hunter Vineyard Tours** (✆ **02/4991 1659**), which has a full-day tour on a 12- or 21-seat bus, taking in five wineries. It costs A$38 (US$30), or A$55 (US$44) with a two-course meal.

A tranquil way to see the wineries is from above. **Balloon Aloft,** in Cessnock (✆ **1800/028 568** in Australia, or 02/4938 1955; www.balloonaloft.com.au), offers year-round dawn balloon flights that include post-flight champagne and optional breakfast costing A$16 (US$13). Flights last about an hour and cost A$280 (US$224) for adults and A$170 (US$136) for kids ages 8 to 12.

If you like adventure, try **Grapemobile Bicycle and Walking Tours** (✆ **0500/804 039** in Australia, or ✆/fax 02/4991 2339). This company supplies you with a bike, helmet, guide, and support bus, and takes you on a peaceful meander through the wineries. Tours cost A$98 (US$78), including lunch in a restaurant. The firm also rents bicycles—A$22 (US$18) for a half-day and A$30 (US$24) for a full day.

## 3 Port Stephens: Dolphin- & Whale-Watching ★★

209km (136 miles) N of Sydney

**Port Stephens,** just 2½ hours north of Sydney, should be at the top of any New South Wales itinerary. It's a perfect add-on to a trip to the Hunter Valley (p. 188). Though you can come up from Sydney for the day, I recommend staying in the general area for at least 1 night. The sheltered Port Stephens bay is more than twice the size of Sydney Harbour and is as clean as a newly poured bath. The sea literally jumps with fish, and the creamy islands and surrounding Tomaree National Park boast more species of birds than even Kakadu National Park in the Northern Territory. Two pods of bottlenosed dolphins, around 70 individuals in all, call the bay home, and you are almost certain to see some on a dolphin-watching cruise. Port Stephens is also a fabulous place to watch whales during their migration to the breeding grounds farther north (roughly from June to mid-Nov—though they are less frequently seen in Aug). There is also a large breeding colony of koalas in Lemon Tree Passage on the south side of the Tomaree Peninsula, which makes up the southern shoreline of the bay.

The main town, **Nelson Bay** (pop. 7,000), is on the northern side of the peninsula. The township of Shoal Bay, farther along the peninsula, has a spectacular beach edged with wildflowers. Another small resort town, **Anna Bay,** is the largest development on the southern side of the peninsula and has excellent surf beaches. The Stockton Bight stretches some 32km (20 miles) from Anna Bay south to the large industrial town of Newcastle. The beach here is popular with ocean fishermen who have the awful habit of driving their four-wheel-drives along it. The first 500m (1,640 ft.) of the beach is for swimming and surfing only. The Stockton Sand Dunes, which run behind the beach, are the longest in the Southern Hemisphere and several operators offer sandboarding and interesting four-wheel-drive trips of the area.

Opposite the Tomaree Peninsula, across the bay, are the small tourist townships of Tea Gardens and Hawks Nest, both at the mouth of the Myall River.

### ESSENTIALS

**GETTING THERE** To get to Port Stephens, take the Sydney-Newcastle Freeway (F3) to its end, and then follow the Pacific Highway signs to Hexham and Port Stephens. **Port Stephens Coaches** (✆ **1800/045 949** in Sydney, or 02/4982 2940;

pscoaches.com.au) travel between Port Stephens and Newcastle, and to Nelson Bay from Sydney daily at 2pm. Buses from Sydney leave from Eddy Avenue, near Central Station; the journey takes 3½ hours. Round-trip tickets cost A$48 (US$38) for adults and A$32 (US$26) for children. You must book ahead. There's no train service to Port Stephens.

**VISITOR INFORMATION** The **Port Stephens Visitor Information Centre,** Victoria Parade, Nelson Bay (✆ **1800/808 900** in Australia, or 02/4981 1579; fax 02/4984 1855; www.portstephens.org.au), is open Monday through Friday from 9am to 5pm, and Saturday and Sunday from 9am to 4pm.

## ACCOMMODATIONS YOU CAN AFFORD

Port Stephens is popular with Sydneysiders, especially during the Christmas holidays, January, and Easter, so you'll need to book well in advance then. The Port Stephens YHA (✆ **02/4982 1921;** www.yha.com.au) has a few doubles and family rooms as well as dorms. Dorm beds cost A$24 to A$27 (US$19–US$22); a double with shared bathroom costs A$65 (US$52), and a double with its own bathroom costs A$85 (US$68).

**Port Stephens Motor Lodge** Surrounded by trees and gardens, this motor lodge a short stroll from the main township is a peaceful place. The standard rooms are plain, with raw-brick walls, a double bed (and an extra single bed in most rooms), a private balcony, and an attached shower with half-tub. Adjacent to the lodge is a self-contained family unit for four; it has two bedrooms, a laundry, and water views. There's a barbecue area on the grounds. Rates peak during the Christmas holiday period.

44 Mangus St., Nelson Bay, NSW 2315. ✆ **02/4981 3366.** Fax 02/4984 1655. psmlodge@aol.com. 17 units. A$60–A$120 (US$48–US$96) standard double; A$88 (US$70) family unit weekday, A$120 (US$96) family unit weekend. Extra adult A$10 (US$8); extra child under 15 A$5 (US$4). AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Heated outdoor pool; coin-op laundry; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

**Salamander Shores** ★ Salamander Shores looks like a beached paddle steamer—it's all white-painted bricks and rails and stairs, fixed to the bay by a jetty. Set in a well-tended, sloping garden, this five-story hotel retains a certain 1960s charm, despite selective modernization. Standard rooms are similar to most motel rooms, but you really should throw caution to the wind and get a sea-view room—you won't regret it. These rooms have Jacuzzis and large balconies with extensive views of the bay. When the sun rises over the water and the garden is full of lorikeets and corellas, it couldn't be more picture-perfect. Down below is a pub and shop selling alcohol.

147 Soldiers Point Rd., Soldiers Point, NSW 2317. ✆ **1800/655 029** in Australia, or 02/4982 7210. Fax 02/4982 7890. www.salamander-shores.com. 90 units. A$109 (US$87) standard double; A$142 (US$114) garden-view double; A$161 (US$129) sea-view double; A$229 (US$183) family suite; A$264 (US$211) penthouse. Extra person A$18 (US$14). Ask about packages. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; bar; small heated outdoor pool; sauna; tour desk; babysitting; laundry service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

### *Finds* Through the Dunes on Horseback

You can ride a horse through the dunes with **Sahara Horse Trails** (✆ **02/4981 9077;** www.saharatrails.com). The barn is on Port Stephens Road, before you reach Nelson Bay. A 2-hour trip costs A$60 (US$48), and a half-day excursion is A$120 (US$96). Bookings required at least 1 day in advance.

## WHERE TO DINE

Most people head to **Nelson Bay** for their meals because of the great views. You'll find a host of cheap takeout joints at the main waterside shopping and eatery complex at D'Albora Marinas.

**Sinclair's** ★ SEAFOOD/PASTA It's a bit noisy inside, but the lunchtime food makes up for it. The fish and chips are nice, as is the linguini. Outside is a small section where you can buy a range of excellent local oysters for A$2.50 (US$2) each.

D'Albora Marinas. ✆ **02/4984 4444.** Reservations recommended. Main courses A$12–A$22 (US$9.60–US$18). MC, V. Daily noon–3pm and 6–10pm.

## SEEING THE AREA

Several operators offer **dolphin- and whale-watching cruises.** Some of the best are aboard ***Imagine*** (✆ **02/4984 9000;** www.imaginecruises.com.au), a 15m (49-ft.) catamaran operated by Frank Future and Yves Papin, two real characters. They offer a daily Island Discovery trip that includes dolphin-watching and a trip around the offshore islands. The 4-hour cruise departs from D'Albora Marina in Nelson Bay daily at 11am and costs A$49 (US$39) for adults and A$25 (US$20) for children 4 to 14, including lunch.

Four-hour whale-watching tours cost the same and leave at 11am from June 1 to November 15. You are most likely to spot humpback whales, but there's also a chance to see minke and southern right whales.

A dolphin-watching cruise runs from 10:30am to 12:30pm daily during summer and costs A$20 (US$16) for adults, A$13 (US$10) for children, and A$53 (US$42) for families. If you happen to be around on the weekend nearest a full moon, ask about overnight Full Moon Tours.

The **Port Stephens Ferry Service** (✆ **02/4981 3798,** or 0419/417 689 mobile) operates a 2½-hour Early Bird Dolphin Watch, with a stop at Tea Gardens township, daily at 8:30am. A similar 3½-hour cruise departs at noon (you can eat lunch in Tea Gardens), and a 2-hour dolphin-watching cruise departs at 3:30pm. All cruises cost A$17 (US$14) for adults, A$9 (US$7.20) for children, and A$40 (US$32) for families.

**Moonshadow Cruises** (✆ **02/4984 9388;** www.moonshadow.com.au) has the largest vessels in Port Stephens and offers whale-watching and dolphin-watching cruises, as well as an evening cruise with a buffet meal I found quite disappointing. The whale-watching cruise costs A$45 (US$36) for adults, A$40 (US$32) for seniors and college students, A$30 (US$24) for high school students, A$22 (US$17) for children (4–12 years), and A$112 (US$89) for families (2 adults, 2 children). The dolphin-watching cruise cost A$19 (US$15) for adults, A$16 (US$13) for seniors and students, A$11 (US$8) for children (4–12 years), and A$49 (US$39) for families (2 adults, 2 children). The company also offers sand-boarding and four-wheel-drive tours of Stockton Beach.

# 4 North of Sydney Along the Pacific Highway: Australia's Holiday Coast

The Pacific Highway leads over the Sydney Harbour Bridge and merges into the Sydney-Newcastle Freeway. It continues to the industrial coast town of Newcastle, bypassing Tuggerah Lake and Lake Macquarie (neither of real interest compared to what follows). From here, the Pacific Highway stays close to the coast until it reaches Brisbane, some 1,000km (620 miles) from Sydney.

Though the road is gradually being upgraded, conditions vary, and distances are long. Travelers should be aware that the route is renowned for its accidents. Though you could make it to Brisbane in a couple of days, you could also easily spend more than a week stopping off at the attractions along the way. The farther north you travel, the more tropical the landscape gets. By the time visitors reach the coastal resort town of Coffs Harbour, temperatures have noticeably increased, and banana palms and sugar-cane plantations start to appear.

Along the coast, you'll find excellent fishing and superb beaches, most of them virtually deserted. Inland, the Great Dividing Range, which separates the wetter eastern plains from the dry interior, throws up rainforests, extinct volcanoes, and hobby farms growing tropical fruit as you head farther north toward Queensland. Along the way are a series of national parks, most of them requiring detours of several kilometers. Those you shouldn't miss include the **Dorrigo** and **Mount Warning** national parks, both of which encompass some of the country's best and most accessible rainforests.

## PORT MACQUARIE

423km (262 miles) N of Sydney

Port Macquarie (pop. 28,000), about halfway between Sydney and the Queensland border, boasts some fabulous beaches; Flynn's Beach in particular is a haven for surfers. Boating and fishing are other popular pastimes.

### ESSENTIALS

**GETTING THERE** From Sydney, follow the Pacific Highway and the Sydney-Newcastle Freeway (F3). **Eastern Australia Airways** (✆ **02/9691 2333**) flies between Sydney and Port Macquarie. The coach trip from Sydney takes about 7 hours.

**VISITOR INFORMATION** The **Port Macquarie Visitor Information Centre,** at the corner of Clarence and Hay streets, under the Civic Centre (✆ **1800/025 935** in Australia, or 02/6581 8000; www.portmacquarieinfo.com.au), is open Monday through Friday from 8:30am to 5pm and Saturday and Sunday from 9am to 4pm.

### ACCOMMODATIONS YOU CAN AFFORD

The **Port Macquarie YHA** (✆ **02/6583 5512;** www.yha.com.au) is a nice beach-house-style hostel with dorm rooms, four double rooms, two twin rooms, and two family rooms. Dorm beds cost A$24 to A$27 (US$19–US$22); a double without a bathroom costs A$65 (US$52), and a double with a bathroom costs A$85 (US$68). There are more YHA hostels along the north coast at Coffs Harbour, Ballina, Bellingen, Byron Bay, Forster, Girvan, Lennox Head, Murwillumbah, and Nimbin.

**El Paso Motor Inn** On the waterfront, the El Paso offers standard motel-type rooms; the more expensive deluxe doubles are larger and have newer furniture and a fresher coat of paint. Two rooms have Jacuzzis, and some come with kitchenettes. The third-floor three-room suite has good ocean views and a kitchenette.

29 Clarence St., Port Macquarie, NSW 2444. ✆ **1800/027 965** in Australia, or 02/6583 1944. Fax 02/6584 1021. 55 units. A$87 (US$70) standard double; A$97 (US$78) deluxe double; A$130 (US$104) Jacuzzi room; A$150 (US$120) suite. Extra person A$10 (US$8). A$30 (US$24) surcharge per room per night Easter, Christmas, and some long weekends. DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; good-size heated outdoor pool; Jacuzzi; sauna; game room; tour desk; babysitting; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, kitchenette (in some), minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

### EXPLORING THE AREA

**The Billabong Koala and Wildlife Park,** 61 Billabong Dr., Port Macquarie (✆ **02/6585 1060**), is a family-owned nature park where you can get up close to hand-raised

koalas, kangaroos, emus, wombats, many types of birds, and fish. You can pat the koalas at 10:30am, 1:30, and 3:30pm. There are also barbecue facilities, picnic grounds, and a restaurant. Allow 2 hours to fully experience this recommended wildlife park. It's open daily from 9am to 5pm; admission is A$8 (US$6.40) for adults and A$5 (US$4) for children.

The 257-passenger vessel ***Port Venture*** (✆ **02/6583 3058**) offers a 2-hour scenic cruise on the Hastings River. It leaves from the wharf at the end of Clarence Street Tuesday and Thursday through Sunday at 10am and 2pm. Cruises cost A$20 (US$16) for adults, A$8 (US$6.40) for children 6 to 14, and A$49 (US$39) for families. Reservations are essential. The boat also travels up the river on a 5-hour Barbecue Cruise every Wednesday at 10am. It docks at a private bush park along the way, and passengers can tuck into a traditional Aussie barbecue of steaks, fish, and salad. You can then fish, take a bushwalk, swim, or take a 20-minute four-wheel-drive trip. The 5-hour cruise costs A$37 (US$30) for adults, A$18 (US$14) for children, and A$94 (US$75) for families. A 4-hour cruise leaves on Monday at 10am. It costs A$35 (US$28) for adults, A$15 (US$12) for children, and A$88 (US$70) for families.

## COFFS HARBOUR: BANANA CAPITAL OF AUSTRALIA

554km (344 miles) N of Sydney; 427km (265 miles) S of Brisbane

Rainforests, beaches, and sand surround the relaxed capital of Australia's Holiday Coast. The state's "banana republic" headquarters—the area produces more bananas than any other in Australia—is bordered by hillsides furrowed with rows of banana palms. Farther inland, the rolling hills plateau into Dorrigo National Park, one of the best examples of accessible rainforests anywhere. Also inland is the Nymboida River, known for its excellent white-water rafting.

Coffs Harbour is a rather disjointed place, with an old town-center retail area; the Jetty Strip (with restaurants and fishing boats) near the best swimming spot, Park Beach; and a new retail area called the Plaza. Wide sweeps of suburbia separate the three areas; it's a difficult town to negotiate if you don't have a car.

### ESSENTIALS

**GETTING THERE** It takes around 7 hours to drive from Sydney to Coffs Harbour without stops; from Brisbane it takes around 5 hours. The Pacific Highway in this region is notoriously dangerous; many serious accidents have involved drivers enduring long hours behind the wheel. Ongoing road-widening projects should improve things. **Qantas** (✆ **13 13 13** in Australia, or 800/227-4500 in the U.S. and Canada) flies nonstop to Coffs Harbour from Sydney. Several coach companies, including **Greyhound Australia** (✆ **13 14 99** in Australia. or 07/4690 9950; www.greyhound.com.au), make the trip from Sydney in about 9 hours. A **Countrylink** (✆ **13 22 32** in Australia, or 02/8202 2000) train from Sydney costs A$79 (US$63) for adults, A$39 (US$32) for children (4–15 years).

**VISITOR INFORMATION** The **Coffs Harbour Visitors Information Centre** (✆ **1800/025 650** in Australia, or 02/6652 1522) is just off the Pacific Highway, at the corner of Rose Avenue and Marcia Street, 2 blocks north of the city center. It's open daily from 9am to 5pm.

**GETTING AROUND** If you don't have a car, you can get around on **Coffs Harbour Coaches** (✆ **02/6652 2877**), which runs day trips around the local area on weekdays (including a town tour on Mon, and a trip to the magnificent Dorrigo

National Park on Wed). **Blue Tongue Transport** ★ (✆ **1800/258 386** in Australia, or 02/6651 8566) offers smaller group tours. They include a daily trip to Dorrigo National Park costing A$50 (US$40) for adults and A$40 (US$32) for children, a morning city tour for A$11 (US$8.80), and an upmarket afternoon champagne tour of town for A$22 (US$18).

## ACCOMMODATIONS YOU CAN AFFORD

Coffs Harbour is a popular beachside holiday spot, with plenty of motels along the Pacific Highway offering standard roadside rooms for A$35 to A$49 (US$28–US$39). Vacancy signs are common outside Australian school holiday periods and the Christmas and Easter periods (when Coffs really fills up). A few to try are the **Caribbean Motel,** 353 High St., Coffs Harbour, NSW 2450 (✆ **02/6652 1500;** fax 02/6651 4158), with doubles ranging from A$55 to A$120 (US$44–US$96), depending on the season and the view; and the **Coffs Harbour Motor Inn,** 22 Elizabeth St., Coffs Harbour, NSW 2450 (✆ **02/6652 6388;** fax 02/6652 6493), with doubles for A$72 to A$108 (US$58–US$86), depending on the season.

The Coffs Harbour YHA (✆ **02/6652 6462;** www.yha.com.au), 51 Collingwood St., has dorm beds for A$24 to A$27 (US$19–US$22), 12 doubles for A$65 (US$52), and family rooms for A$85 (US$68)—the most expensive have private bathrooms.

**Pelican Beach Resort Australis** ★ *Value* This Bali-style resort complex is 7km (4½ miles) north of Coffs Harbour beside a long stretch of creamy sand. (The beach is dangerous for swimming.) Terraced over six levels, the resort's rooms all have balconies, and many have ocean views. Standard rooms are light and modern, with either twin or queen-size beds. Family rooms have a kitchenette, a dining area, and one queen-size and two single beds divided by a half wall. Suites have a separate bedroom, kitchenette, lounge area, and Jacuzzi. Two rooms are equipped for travelers with disabilities. The highest rates apply from December 26 through January 18. Outside in the landscaped gardens are a minigolf course and a volleyball court.

Pacific Hwy., Coffs Harbour, NSW 2450. ✆ **1300/650 464** in Australia, or 02/6653 7000. Fax 02/6653 7066. 112 units. www.australishotels.com. A$120–A$215 (US$96–US$172) double; A$184–A$330 (US$147–US$264) family room for up to 4; A$236–A$463 (US$189–US$370) suite. Extra person A$33 (US$26). Ask about packages and discounts. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; large lagoon-style pool; minigolf; 3 tennis courts; volleyball court; exercise room; 2 Jacuzzis; sauna; children's center (weekends); game room; concierge; tour desk; car-rental desk; 24-hr. room service; massage; babysitting; free self-service laundry; dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, kitchenette (in some), minibar, hair dryer, iron.

**Sanctuary Motor Inn Resort** If you like animals, you'll love this animal sanctuary and guesthouse 2km (1¼ miles) south of town. Wandering around the grounds are wallabies, kangaroos, peacocks, and several species of native birds. The rooms are comfortable; the more expensive units are larger and more recently renovated. The executive room comes with a Jacuzzi. Four units have kitchens.

Pacific Hwy., Coffs Harbour, NSW 2450. ✆ **02/6652 2111.** Fax 02/6652 4725. phciscato@hotmail.com.au. 38 units. A$88 (US$70) standard double; A$94 (US$75) superior double; A$150 (US$120) executive double. Extra person A$15 (US$12). Holiday surcharge A$25 (US$20) per room per night. Ask about Aussie auto club discounts. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; large heated outdoor pool; minigolf; lighted tennis and squash courts; Jacuzzi; sauna; room service (7–9am and 6–8pm); coin-op laundry. *In room:* A/C, TV w/free satellite channels, kitchen (in some), fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer.

## WHERE TO DINE

**Seafood Mama's** ★ ITALIAN/SEAFOOD This charming, informal, award-winning restaurant packs a mean barbecue seafood dish of octopus, prawns, fish, calamari,

and mussels. It's a rustic, bottles-hanging-from-the-ceiling Italian joint right on the ocean. Also on the menu are some well-regarded veal and steak dishes, and plenty of pastas. Seafood Mama's is near the Pelican Beach and the older Nautilus resorts, 7km (4½ miles) north of Coffs Harbour. The restaurant will do takeout and deliver to your hotel.

Pacific Hwy. ✆ **02/6653 6733.** Reservations recommended. Main courses A$13–A$25 (US$10–US$20). AE, DC, MC, V. Tues–Sat 6–10pm.

## VISITING THE BIG BANANA & OTHER THINGS TO DO

You can't miss the 10m (33-ft.) reinforced-concrete banana alongside the highway at the **Big Banana Theme Park** (✆ **02/6652 4355**), 3km (2 miles) north of town. The park has an air-conditioned, diesel-powered train that takes visitors on a 1-hour tour of the 18-hectare (44-acre) banana plantation, which contains some 18,000 banana trees. Along the route it passes various off-the-wall exhibits relating to farming, Aborigines, and local history. It stops at the property's hydroponic glasshouses and at a viewing platform and cafeteria, which serves all things banana—cakes, breads, splits, shakes, and so on. The park is open daily from 9am to 4:30pm (3pm in winter). Admission is free, but the train tour costs A$10 (US$8) for adults, A$6 (US$4.80) for children, and A$25 (US$20) for families. I had my doubts about this place before I visited, but I ended up charmed—even if it was simply because of the place's wackiness.

The **Coffs Harbour Zoo** (✆ **02/6656 1330**), just north of town on the Pacific Highway, has plenty of koalas, as well as wombats, kangaroos, dingoes, Tasmanian devils, waterbirds, and aviaries. The award-winning native gardens are full of wild birds expecting a feed. The zoo is open daily from 8:30am to 4pm. Admission is A$12 (US$9.60) for adults, A$6 (US$4.80) for children, and A$30 (US$24) for families.

A free natural attraction is **Mutton Bird Island,** which you can get to from the Coffs Harbour jetty. A steep path leads up the side of the island, but views from the top are worth it. Between September and April the island is home to thousands of shearwaters (mutton birds), which make their nests in burrows in the ground.

If you prefer fish, try diving with gray nurse sharks, manta rays, and moray eels with **Island Snorkel and Dive** (✆ **02/6654 2860**) or **Dive Quest** (✆ **02/6654 1930**). The ***Pamela Star*** (✆ **02/6658 4379**) offers good-value deep-sea-fishing trips for A$60 (US$48), including tackle, bait, and lunch. The boat leaves Coffs Harbour jetty at 7:30am and returns at 1:30pm daily.

For a taste of gold fever, head to **George's Gold Mine,** 40km (25 miles) west of Coffs Harbour on Bushman's Range Road (✆ **02/6654 5355** or 02/6654 5273). You get to go into an old-time gold mine, see the "stamper battery" crushing the ore, and pan for gold yourself. The mine is open Wednesday through Sunday (daily during school and public holidays) from 10:30am to 4pm. Admission is A$9 (US$7.20) for adults, A$4.50 (US$3.60) for children, and A$26 (US$21) for families.

**Kiwi Down Under Farm** (✆ **02/6653 4449**) is a fascinating organic farm growing kiwi fruit and macadamia nuts, among other things. No nasty sprays are used here. Free 30- to 45-minute guided tours of the property leave at 2, 3, and 4pm on weekends and school holidays. The teashop on the premises serves amazing scones and jam for A$4.50 (US$3.60) and excellent vegetarian lunches for A$8.50 (US$6.80). The farm is 14km (8½ miles) south of Coffs Harbour; turn off at Gleniffer Road, just south of Bonville, and follow signs for 4km (2½ miles).

## EXPLORING THE RAINFORESTS & OTHER OUTDOOR ADVENTURES

Coffs Harbour's main advantage is its position as a good base for exploring the surrounding countryside. You must see the World Heritage–listed **Dorrigo National Park** ★★, 68km (42 miles) west of Coffs Harbour, via Bellingen. Perched on the Great Dividing Range that separates the lush eastern seaboard from the arid interior, the rainforest here is one of the best I've seen in Australia. (It's a pity that so much fell to the axes of early settlers.) Admission is free.

The **Dorrigo Rainforest Centre** (✆ **02/6657 2309**) is the gateway to the park and has extensive information on the rainforest. Just outside is the 21m-high (69-ft.) **Skywalk,** which offers a bird's-eye view of the forest canopy. Several walks leave from the Rainforest Centre, the Glade Picnic Area (about 1km/½ mile away), and the Never-Never Picnic Area (a 10km/6¼-mile drive along Dome Rd.). Most tracks are suitable for wheelchairs. Bring a raincoat or an umbrella; it is a rainforest, after all! The **Dorrigo Tourist Information** office (✆ **02/6657 2486**) is in the center of Dorrigo township.

One of the best tour operators in the area is the award-winning **Mountain Trails 4WD Tours** (✆ **02/6658 3333;** fax 02/6658 3299). Full-day tours that include visits to two rainforest areas and a good lunch cost A$80 (US$64) for adults and A$60 (US$48) for children under 16. Half-day tours of one rainforest cost A$56 (US$45) for adults and A$40 (US$32) for children under 16.

You can also try horseback riding through the rainforest 23km (14 miles) southwest of Coffs Harbour with **Valery Trails** (✆ **02/6653 4301**). Two-hour rides leave at 10am and 2pm daily and cost A$35 (US$28) per person. Reservations are essential.

Feel the need for speed? Head to **Raleigh International Raceway** (✆ **02/6655 4017**), where you can zip around the track behind the wheel of a go-kart. It's 23km (14 miles) south of Coffs Harbour and 3km (2 miles) along Valery Road off the Pacific Highway north of Nambucca Heads. Eleven high-speed laps cost A$27 (US$22), and sixteen laps cost A$38 (US$30). It's open daily from 9am to 5pm (6pm in summer).

## SHOPPING FOR ARTS & CRAFTS

The area has several recognized "crafts drives," where tourists can go in search of quality souvenirs. Pick up a free copy of *Discover the Coffs Harbour Region* from the tourist information center for details on the dozens of crafts shops in the area. One of the best is the **Australian Wild Flower Gallery** (✆ **02/6651 5763**), just off West High Street and Bennetts Road in Coffs Harbour proper. Wolfgang Shultze carves intricate designs out of pewter, silver, and gold to make detailed animal- and plant-inspired jewelry, charms, and spoons. Pieces cost A$5 to A$36 (US$4–US$29). The gallery is open daily from 9am to 5pm.

On the way to or from the Dorrigo rainforest, stop off at the township of **Bellingen,** 20 minutes south of Coffs Harbour on Waterfall Way. It's a pleasant place with several crafts shops. Among the best is **The Old Church,** 8 Church St., just off the main road (✆ **02/6655 0438**), crammed full of wooden crafts items, cards, furniture, wacky mobiles, incense, hats, and knickknacks, and surrounded by gardens and fruit trees. It's open daily from 8:30am to 5:30pm.

## BYRON BAY: A BEACH BOHEMIA ★

790km (490 miles) N of Sydney; 200km (124 miles) S of Brisbane; 78km (48 miles) SE of Murwillumbah

At the easternmost point on the Australian mainland, the sun's rays hit Byron before anywhere else. This geographical position is good for two things: You can spot whales

as they migrate north in June and July, and it's attractive to the town's "alternative" community. Painters, craftspeople, glass blowers, and poets are so plentiful they almost fall from the macadamia trees. The place is loaded with float tanks, "pure body products," beauty therapists, and massage centers. Though it attracts squadrons of backpackers to its party scene and discos each summer, many of the locals simply stay at home, sipping their herbal tea and preparing for the healing light of the coming dawn. Families love Byron Bay for the beautiful beaches, and surfers flock here for some of the best waves in the world.

## ESSENTIALS

**GETTING THERE** If you're driving up the north coast, leave the Pacific Highway at Ballina and take the scenic coast road via Lennox Head. It's around 10 hours by car from Sydney and 2 hours from Brisbane.

**Regional Express** (✆ **13 17 13** in Australia, or 02/6393 5550; www.regionalexpress.com.au) flies from Sydney to Ballina, south of Byron Bay. The round-trip fare is around A$280 (US$224). **Virgin Blue** (www.virginblue.com.au) also flies to Ballina. **Byron Bus Transfers** (✆ **02/6681 3354**) meets all flights and transfers to Byron Bay for A$20 (US$16) one-way and A$35 (US$28) round-trip. **Coolangatta airport** is 1 hour north of Byron Bay (112km/69 miles). **Countrylink** (✆ **13 22 32** in Australia, or 02/8202 2000) runs daily trains from Sydney to Byron Bay; the one-way fare is A$98 (US$78) for adults and A$47 (US$38) for children (4-15 years), and the trip takes 13 hours. **Greyhound Australia** (✆ **13 14 99** in Australia, or 07/4690 9950; www.greyhound.com.au) buses from Sydney take 14 hours; the one-way coach fare is A$69 (US$55).

**ORGANIZED TOURS FROM SYDNEY** An unusual way to get to Byron is on a 5-day surf safari from Sydney with **Surfaris** (✆ **1800/634 941** in Australia; www.surfaris.com). You can learn to surf along the way as you stop off at several beaches, camping overnight. Trips leave Sydney on Monday morning and Byron Bay on Sunday morning. The safari costs A$499 (US$399) per person, all-inclusive—though you need to bring a sleeping bag.

Another great trip is with **Ando's Outback Tours** (✆ **1800/228 828** in Australia, or 02/6842 8286; www.outbacktours.com.au), which operates from Sydney every Sunday. It heads inland deep into the Outback on a 5-day trip and returns to Byron Bay. Among the highlights are visits to Lightning Ridge and the wild Glengarry opal fields (see "Outback New South Wales," later in this chapter). The trip costs A$435 (US$348) per person. A return trip to Sydney from Byron Bay costs A$35 (US$28).

**VISITOR INFORMATION** The **Byron Visitors Centre,** 80 Jonson St., Byron Bay, NSW 2481 (✆ **02/6680 9271**), is open daily from 9am to 5pm. A half-hour farther south is the **Ballina Tourist Information Centre,** on the corner of Las Balsas Plaza and River Street, Ballina (✆ **02/6686 3484**), open daily from 9am to 5pm. A good website is **www.byronbay-online.com**.

**SPECIAL EVENTS** Byron goes to town during 4 days over the Easter weekend with the **East Coast Blues & Roots Festival** (www.bluesfest.com.au). Up to 30,000 people camp out to listen to up to 80 acts, including the likes of Ben Harper, Midnight Oil, and Joan Armatrading. Book tickets on the Web. On the first Sunday of every month, the extraordinary **crafts market** brings hippies and performers out from the hinterland. Byron Bay is popular over the Christmas period, so book well in advance.

## ACCOMMODATIONS YOU CAN AFFORD

Real-estate agents **Elders R Gordon & Sons** (✆ **02/6685 6222;** eldersbb@omcs.com.au) can book rooms and cottages in Byron Bay and in the hinterland. The **Byron Bay Accommodation Booking Office** (✆ **02/6680 8666;** www.byronbayaccom.net) is very helpful for booking places to stay before you arrive.

**Arts Factory Lodge** *Finds* This is a wacky kind of place. Once famous as a music club popular with American draft-dodgers during the Vietnam War, it's now big with young travelers seeking an alternative place to stay and older folk who cut their hair short years ago. Accommodations include tepees, tents, rooms made from bark strips, and funky indoor "cubes." The so-called Love Shack is more standard and quite tropical in appearance. Workshops include didgeridoo making, massage, yoga, and even boxing! The entertainment lineup includes live music, fire shows, Aboriginal culture, and sports. A cafe serves vegetarian meals, and the property has a great outdoor pool and lush gardens.

Skinners Shoot Rd., Byron Bay, NSW 2481. ✆ **02/6685 7709.** Fax 02/6685 8534. www.artsfactory.com.au. A$25 (US$20) dorm; A$63 (US$50) cube; A$70 (US$56) Love Shack. 3-night minimum. MC, V. Discounts for 5 nights. **Amenities:** Cafe; outdoor pool; free use of bikes; free minibus to town. *In room:* No phone.

**Byron Central Apartments** If you don't want to eat out all the time, then this is the place for you. The self-contained apartments come with a queen-size bed and free in-house movies. First-floor units have balconies. There are also a few loft-style apartments with separate dining, lounge, and sleeping areas. Units for people with disabilities are available. The landscaped garden has a barbecue. The apartments are a 2-minute walk from the beach and town. Rates are at their highest in the Christmas and New Year period; low season is April through September.

Byron St., Byron Bay, NSW 2481. ✆ **02/6685 8800.** Fax 02/6685 8802. www.byronbay.com/bca. 26 units. A$120–A$260 (US$96–US$208) standard apt. Ask about long-term discounts. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Medium-size salt-water pool; coin-op laundry; nonsmoking rooms; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* TV, kitchen, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer.

**Holiday Village Backpackers** ★ Byron Bay's original hostel is still one of the best. It's in the center of town next door to Woolworth's supermarket and only a few minutes' walk from the bus and train stops, the main beach, and the town center. The National Roads and Motorists' Association gives this place a five-star backpackers' rating, which is as good as it gets. Dorm rooms are clean, and doubles in the hostel are above average. Doubles come with a double bed, a fan, and a wardrobe. For a couple of dollars more you can stay in a self-contained unit with a separate bedroom, lounge, and kitchen area. On the premises are a volleyball court; Jacuzzi and pool; TV and video lounge (with a library); barbecues; basketball hoop; Internet and e-mail; and free surfboards, body boards, and bikes.

116 Jonson St., Byron Bay, NSW 2481. ✆ **02/6685 8888.** Fax 02/6685 8777. 42 units, 13 with bathroom. A$55–A$65 (US$44–US$52) hostel double; A$70–A$85 (US$56–US$68) self-contained double; A$21–A$29 (US$17–US$23) dorm bed. MC, V. **Amenities:** Medium-size heated outdoor pool; Jacuzzi; bikes; tour desk; coin-op laundry; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* Fridge.

## BYRON ON A SUPER CHEAP BUDGET

Here's a run down of some of the bets places with private rooms in Byron for the frugal traveler.

The Cape Byron YHA (✆ **02/6685 8788;** www.yha.com.au) is a good option. It's clean, friendly, has its own pool, regular barbecues, free body boards (boogie boards),

and is very close to town. Dorms cost A$22 to A$24 (US$18–US$19); the six doubles cost A$64 (US$51) each, and the only double with bathroom costs A$72 (US$58).

J's Bay YHA (✆ **02/6685 8853**) is slightly farther from the beach but also in the town center. It's got lots of communal areas and a superb pool, and each room has an outdoor deck, too. As well as dorm rooms, there are six doubles here and one family room. The rates are the same as Cape Byron YHA. Non-YHA members must pay an extra A$3.50 (US$2.80) each at both hostels.

A good camping, caravan, and cabin park is Clarkes Beach, off Lighthouse Road, Byron Bay (✆ **02/6685 6496;** www.bshp.com.au/clarkes). It's a short walk to town, and just across from the beach. Unpowered sites cost A$23 to A$37 (US$18–US$30) depending on the season (Christmas/Jan period and Easter have the highest rates), powered sites cost A$25 to A$40 (US$22–US$32), and self-contained cabins cost A$85 to A$120 (US$68–US$96). It's run by the local government council, which also operates two other holiday parks: Suffolk Park, Alcon Street (✆ **02/6685 33530**), and the nicer Broken Head Holiday Park, Beach Road, Broken Head (✆ **02/6685 3234**). Rates are around the same as Clarkes Beach, and both Suffolk Park and Broken Head are a short drive from Byron Bay—too far to walk, though.

## WHERE TO DINE

Byron Bay's **Jonson Street** is crammed with eateries, so you certainly won't starve. For meals below the A$10 (US$8) mark, try the organic menu at Fundamental Foods (✆ **02/6685 6429**). Otherwise, Oz Bakehouse (✆ **02/6685 7717**) has lots of pies and the like, as well as inexpensive meals.

**Beach Hotel Barbecue** PUB/BARBECUE The outdoor meals at this pub near the beach make it popular with visitors and locals. About the cheapest thing on the menu is the burger, and the most expensive is steak. The Beach Hotel Bistro is open from 10am to 9pm daily and serves coffee, cakes, and snacks throughout the day; a lunch menu is served from noon to 3pm and dinner from 6 to 9pm.

In the Beach Hotel, at Bay and Johnson sts. ✆ **02/6685 6402.** Main courses A$3.90–A$14 (US$3.10–US$11). No credit cards. Daily noon–3pm.

**Earth 'n' Sea** PIZZA/PASTA This popular spot has been around for years and offers a fairly extensive menu of pastas and pizzas, including some unusual combinations such as prawns, banana, and pineapple. Pizzas come in three sizes; the small is just enough to satisfy the average appetite.

11 Lawson St. ✆ **02/6685 6029.** Reservations recommended. Main courses A$9.50–A$24 (US$7.60–US$19). AE, MC, V. Daily 5:30–11pm.

**The Pass Café** ★ MEDITERRANEAN If you happen to be heading to or from the rainforest on the Cape Byron Walking Track, you'll find this a great place to stop for breakfast or lunch. Breakfast items range from fresh fruit and muffins to gourmet chicken sausages. Lunch specials include Cajun chicken, octopus, and calamari salad, as well as fresh fish, meat dishes, and plenty of good vegetarian options.

At the end of Brooke Dr., on Cape Byron Walking Track, Palm Valley. ✆ **02/6685 6074.** Main courses A$10–A$25 (US$8–US$20). MC, V. Sun–Wed 8am–3pm; Thurs–Sat 8am–6pm.

**Raving Prawn** ★ SEAFOOD Fish cover the walls at this excellent place, and there's more than that on the menu. You can tuck into veal, chicken, or vegetarian

dishes, but I wouldn't miss out on the fabulous signature dish, jewfish (a kind of grouper) with herb-mustard crust. Forest-berry tart is the best dessert on the menu.

Feros Arcade (between Jonson and Lawson sts.). ✆ **02/6685 6737.** Reservations recommended. Main courses A$19–A$27 (US$15–US$22). AE, DC, MC, V. Tues–Sat 6–10pm (until around 9pm in winter); daily 6–10pm during school holidays.

### HITTING THE SURF & SAND

Many accommodations in Byron Bay offer free surfboards for guests. If yours doesn't, head to the **Byron Bay Surf Shop,** Lawson Street at Fletcher Street (✆ **02/6685 7536**), which rents boards for A$12 (US$9.60) for 4 hours and A$20 (US$16) for 24 hours. The shop can also arrange surf lessons for around A$25 (US$20) per hour.

**Wategos Beach** and an area off the tip of Cape Byron called **"The Pass"** are two particularly good surf spots—and since each of the beaches faces a different direction, you are bound to find the surf is up on at least one. **Main Beach,** which stretches along the front of the town (it's actually some 50km/31 miles long), is good for swimming. West of Main Beach is **Belongil Beach,** the unofficial nudist beach (when authorities aren't cracking down on covering up). **Clarke's Beach** curves away to the east of Main Beach toward Cape Byron.

The **Cape Byron Lighthouse** on Cape Byron is one of Australia's most powerful. It's eerie to come up here at night to watch the stars and see the light reach some 40km (25 miles) out to sea. A nice walk just south of town goes through the rainforest of the **Broken Heads Nature Reserve.**

The best place to dive around Byron Bay is at **Julian Rocks,** about 3km (2 miles) offshore. Cold currents from the south meet warmer ones from the north here, which makes it a good spot to find a large variety of marine sea life. **Byron Bay Dive Centre,** 111 Jonson St. (✆ **02/6685 7149**), charges A$70 (US$56) for the first dive and A$35 (US$28) for each subsequent dive. **Sundive,** in the Byron Hostel complex on Middleton Street (✆ **02/6685 7755**), has cheaper initial dives (A$60/US$48 each).

### EXPLORING THE HILLS & RAINFORESTS

Behind Byron you'll find hills that could make the Irish weep, as well as rainforests, waterfalls, and farms burgeoning with tropical fruits. A good operator taking trips inland is **Forgotten Country Ecotours** (✆ **02/6687 7843**). **Byron Bay to Bush Tours** (✆ **02/6685 6889** or 04/1866 2684; bush@mullum.com.au) operates day trips to the hippie hangout of **Nimbin** ★—where during my last visit I was approached four times in 10 minutes by people selling marijuana—and into the rainforest, where you visit a macadamia-nut farm and have a barbecue on the company's organic farm. The trip leaves at 11am Monday through Saturday and costs A$30 (US$24). They also offer trips to the Sunday market at Channon the second Sunday of each month and to the market at Bangalow on the fourth Sunday. These trips cost A$15 (US$12).

## MURWILLUMBAH

321km (199 miles) N of Coffs Harbour; 893km (554 miles) N of Sydney; 30km (19 miles) S of Queensland border

The main town of the Tweed Valley, Murwillumbah is a good base for touring the surrounding area, which includes **Mount Warning,** picturesque towns, and countryside dominated by sugar cane and banana.

### ESSENTIALS

**GETTING THERE** Murwillumbah is inland from the Pacific Highway. The nearest airport is at **Coolangatta,** 34km (21 miles) away, over the Queensland border.

**Countrylink** trains (✆ **13 22 42** in Australia, or 02/8202 2000) link Murwillumbah with Sydney, taking around 13 hours. The one-way fare is A$110 (US$88) for adults and A$55 (US$44) for children (4–15 years) in standard class, A$149 (US$119) for adults and A$75 (US$60) for children (4–15 years) in first class. **Greyhound Australia** (✆ **13 14 99** in Australia, or 07/4690 9950; www.greyhound.com.au) runs from Sydney to Murwillumbah; the trip takes 14½ hours.

**VISITOR INFORMATION** The **Murwillumbah Visitors Centre,** at the corner of the Pacific Highway and Alma Street, Murwillumbah, NSW 2484 (✆ **02/6672 1340**), is worth visiting before heading out to see more of the Tweed Valley or the beaches to the east. Another option is the **Tweed Heads Visitors Centre,** at the corner of Bay and Wharf streets, Tweed Heads, NSW 2485 (✆ **07/5536 4244**). Both are open Monday through Friday from 9am to 5pm, and Saturday from 9am to 1pm.

## WHERE TO STAY & DINE

### Worth a Splurge

**Crystal Creek Rainforest Retreat** ★★ Crystal Creek is tucked away in a valley of rainforest 25 minutes by car from the Pacific Highway. Self-contained cabins skirt the edge of the rainforest that borders the Border Ranges National Park, a World Heritage Site. There are plenty of native birds, possums, echidnas, wallabies, and bandicoots about. Guests can swim in the cold natural pools and laze around on hammocks strung up in the bush. Cabins have two comfortable rooms, a balcony, a kitchen, a barbecue, and plenty of privacy. Two glass-terrace cabins overlook the rainforest and mountain. All rooms have a king-size bed and a double Jacuzzi—with no curtains in the bathroom because the rainforest gives enough privacy. Several tours are offered, including four-wheel-drive rainforest tours and visits to local country markets and arts-and-crafts galleries, as well as walking tours around the property. Guests can cook their own food (bring it with you) or eat at the casual restaurant.

Brookers Rd., Upper Crystal Creek, Murwillumbah, NSW 2484. ✆ **02/6679 1591.** Fax 02/6679 1596. www.crystalcreekrainforestretreat.com.au. 7 cabins. A$240–A$260 (US$192–US$208) double. Ask about weekday specials. AE, DC, MC, V. Pickup service from the airport, bus, and train stations available. Children not accepted. **Amenities:** Restaurant; Jacuzzi; 24-hr. room service; massage; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* TV, kitchen, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron, CD player.

## SEEING THE AREA

If you're looking for a Big Avocado to go with your Coffs Harbour Big Banana, head for **Tropical Fruit World,** on the Pacific Highway (✆ **02/6677 7222**), 15km (9½ miles) north of Murwillumbah and 15km (9½ miles) south of Coolangatta. The Tweed Valley's top attraction grows some 400 varieties of tropical fruit, which you can discover on an interesting 1½-hour tractor-train tour of the 81-hectare (200-acre) plantation, as well as on four-wheel-drive rainforest drives and riverboat rides. It's open daily from 10am to 5pm. Also on the property are a kiosk, fruit market, and gift shop. Admission to food and shopping areas is free. Guided tours cost A$22 (US$18) for adults, A$12 (US$9.60) for children 4 to 12.

The 1,154m (3,785-ft.) **Mount Warning** is part of the rim of an extinct volcano formed some 20 to 23 million years ago. You can hike around the mountain and to the top on trails in the Mount Warning World Heritage Park.

## THE TWEED VALLEY AFTER DARK

The clubs up here on the border of Queensland are huge and offer cheap bistro meals as well as pricier ones in more upscale restaurants, inexpensive drinks at the bar,

entertainment, and hundreds of poker machines. The biggest in New South Wales is the **Twin Towns Services Club,** Wharf Street, Tweed Heads (✆ **07/5536 2277**). Another worth checking out is **Seagulls Rugby League Club,** Gollan Drive, Tweed Heads (✆ **07/5536 3433**). To gain admittance to these "private" clubs, you must sign the registration book just inside the door. Tweed Heads is 40km (25 miles), or about a 30-minute drive, from Murwillumbah.

## 5 South of Sydney Along the Princes Highway

Two main roads lead south out of Sydney: the M5, which turns into the Hume Highway, and the Princes Highway. Both routes connect Sydney to Melbourne, but the M5/Hume Highway route is quicker. A favorite with truckers and anyone in a hurry, the M5/Hume Highway will get you to Melbourne in about 12 hours. The Princes Highway is a scenic coastal route that can get you to Melbourne in 2 days, though the many attractions along the route make it well worth taking longer.

### KIAMA

119km (74 miles) S of Sydney

Kiama (pop. 10,300) is famous for its **blowhole.** In fact, there are two, a large one and a smaller one; both spurt seawater several meters into the air. The larger of the two can jet water up to 60m (197 ft.), but you need a large swell and strong southeasterly winds to force the sea through the rock fissure with enough force to achieve that height. The smaller of the two is more consistent but fares better with a good northeasterly wind.

Pick up a map from the **Kiama Visitors Centre** (see below) to guide you on a Heritage Walk through the historic district of this quaint village, where you can tour a row of National Trust workers' cottages built in 1896. There's little reason to stay the night—plenty of more scenic places await farther south.

#### ESSENTIALS

**GETTING THERE** From Sydney, travel south on the Princes Highway via the steelworks city of Wollongong. There's also regular train service from Sydney and **Greyhound Australia** (✆ **13 14 99** in Australia, or 07/4690 9950; www.greyhound.com.au) coach service. The trip by coach takes about 2 hours, the train trip a little less.

**VISITOR INFORMATION** The **Kiama Visitors Centre,** Blowhole Point, Kiama (✆ **02/4232 3322;** fax 02/4226 3260; www.kiama.com.au), is open daily from 9am to 5pm.

### JERVIS BAY: AN OFF-THE-BEATEN-TRACK GEM ★★

182km (113 miles) S of Sydney

**Booderee National Park,** at Jervis Bay, is nothing short of spectacular. You should come here even if it means missing out on some of Sydney's treasures. How does this grab you—miles of deserted beaches, the whitest sand imaginable, kangaroos you can stroke, lorikeets that mob you for food during the day and possums that do the same at night, pods of dolphins, great walks through gorgeous bushland, and a real Aboriginal spirituality-of-place? I could go on, but see for yourself.

#### ESSENTIALS

**GETTING THERE** It's best to reach Jervis Bay via Huskisson, 24km (15 miles) southeast of Nowra on the Princes Highway. Approximately 16km (10 miles) south of

Nowra, turn left onto the Jervis Bay Road to Huskisson. The entrance to Booderee National Park—formally named Jervis Bay National Park—is just after Huskisson. It's about a 3-hour drive from Sydney. You'll probably need at least 2 days to get to know the area. Look for the black cockatoos.

**Australian Pacific Tours** (✆ **02/9247 7222;** fax 02/9247 2052; www.aptours.com.au) runs a dolphin-watching cruise to Jervis Bay from Sydney every day between early October and mid-April, and Monday and Thursday in winter. The 12-hour trip—7 hours of which are on the coach—includes a visit to the Kiama blowhole, a 3-hour luncheon cruise looking for bottlenose dolphins, and a stop on the way back at Fitzroy Falls in the Southern Highlands. The trip costs A$117 (US$94) for adults and A$109 (US$87) for children.

**East Coast Adventure Tours** (✆ **1800/666 000** in Australia, or 02/4441 6880; www.beachnbush.com.au) takes backpackers and adventurous oldies on a 2-night trip to Jervis Bay every Friday evening. You walk deep into the huge Morton National Park, go on a dolphin cruise, and spend the rest of the weekend in Jervis Bay. The trip costs A$219 (US$175) per person.

**VISITOR INFORMATION** For information on the area, contact the **Shoalhaven Visitors Centre,** at the corner of Princes Highway and Pleasant Way, Nowra (✆ **1800/024 261** in Australia, or 02/4421 0778; www.shoalhaven.nsw.gov.au). Pick up maps and book camping sites at the **Booderee National Park** office (✆ **02/4443 0977;** www.booderee.np.gov.au), located just beyond Huskisson; it's open daily from 9am to 4pm. **Hyams Beach Store** (✆ **02/4443 0242**) has an accommodations guide listing 34 rental properties for A$100 (US$80) and up for a weekend.

## ACCOMMODATIONS YOU CAN AFFORD

If you have a tent and camping gear, all the better. **Caves Beach** is a quiet spot (except when the birds chorus at dawn) just a stroll away from a good beach; it's home to eastern gray kangaroos. A campsite here costs A$8.65 (US$6.90) per tent in winter and A$11 (US$8.80) in summer and on public holidays. It's about a 250m (about ⅒-mile) walk from the car park to the campground. **Greenpatch** is more dirt than grass, but you get your own area, and it's suitable for motor homes. It's infested with overfriendly possums around dusk. A camp spot here costs A$13 (US$10) in winter and A$16 (US$13) in summer. There are no YHAs around here, but there are three along the south coast, at Garringong, near Kiama; and Merimbula and Bateman's Bay farther south (check www.yha.com.au for details).

For supplies, head to the area's main towns, **Huskisson** (pop. 930) and **Vincentia** (pop. 2,350). The **Huskisson RSL Club,** overlooking the wharf area on Owen Street (✆ **02/4441 5282**), has a good bistro and a bar. You'll have to sign in inside the main entrance. The Huskisson Hotel (also called the "Husskie Pub") is down the road and has a nice beer garden and cheapish meals at lunchtime.

**Huskisson Beach Tourist Resort** This resort is the very pinnacle of cabin accommodations on this part of the east coast. Cabins vary in price depending on size, but even the smallest has room enough for a double bed, triple bunks, and a small kitchen with microwave. Larger cabins have two separate bedrooms. There's a game room and barbecue facilities. Weekend prices are huge, so best to stay weekdays. Rates also rise significantly over Christmas and Easter.

Beach St., Huskisson, Jervis Bay, NSW 2540. ✆/fax **02/4441 5142.** www.huskissonbeachtouristresort.com.au. 38 units. Cabins range in price from A$75–A$140 (US$60–US$112) per night on weekdays to A$140–A$320

### Tips A Safety Warning

Jervis Bay is notorious for its car break-ins, a situation the local police force has been unable to control. If you park your car anywhere in the national park, remove all valuables, including things in the trunk.

(US$112–US$256) per night on weekends. DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Small heated outdoor pool; lighted tennis court; game room; coin-op laundry; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* TV, kitchen, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

**Jervis Bay Guest House** ★ This relatively new guesthouse has four distinctly different rooms (different color schemes, beds, and so on), each with a private bathroom. One room has a Jacuzzi, and two rooms face the water and have coffeemakers. Breakfast is a hearty affair that could include emu sausages and thick slabs of bacon followed by a tropical fruit platter.

1 Beach St., Huskisson, NSW 2540 ✆ **02/4441 7658.** Fax 02/4441 7659. www.jervisbayguesthouse.com.au. 4 units. A$145–A$220 (US$116–US$176) double. Rates include breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. After the Jervis Bay Hotel, take the 2nd road to the left (Nowra St.) and follow it to the end. Children under 16 not accepted. **Amenities:** Lounge and game room; tour desk; massage; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, hair dryer, iron.

## SEEING THE AREA

If you want to see the best spots, you'll need to pay the park-entrance fee of A$10 (US$8) per day; a standard NSW National Parks Pass doesn't work here. Places to visit include **Hyams Beach** ★, reputed to have the whitest sand in the world. Notice how it squeaks when you walk on it. Wear sunscreen! The reflection off the beach can burn your skin in minutes even on a cloudy day. **Hole in the Wall Beach** has interesting rock formations and a lingering smell of natural sulfur. Secluded **Summer Cloud Bay** offers excellent fishing.

**Dolphin Watch Cruises,** 74 Owen St., Huskisson (✆ **1800/246 010** in Australia, or 02/4441 6311; www.dolphinwatch.com.au), runs a hardy vessel out of Huskisson on the lookout for the resident pod of bottlenose dolphins—you have "more than a 95% chance of seeing them," the company claims. A 2-hour coffee cruise runs at 10am on Saturday and Sunday, public holidays, and school holidays, and costs A$20 (US$16) for adults and A$10 (US$8) for children. A 2½-hour dolphin watch and bay cruise leaves at 1pm and costs A$25 (US$20) for adults and A$12 (US$9.60) for children. It's possible to see humpback and southern right whales in June and July and from mid-September to mid-November. A 3-hour whale-watch cruise costs A$40 (US$32) for adults and A$30 (US$24) for children 4 to 14 years old.

## ULLADULLA

220km (136 miles) S of Sydney

Very much a supply town as well as a fishing center, especially for tuna, Ulladulla is a pleasant stopover on your journey south. This is also a good place to stock up on supplies. On the outskirts of town (just to the south) are a series of saltwater lakes with good fishing, though you'll have competition from the pelicans. Inland is the giant **Morton National Park** (✆ **02/4887 7270;** www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au) marked by the peak of **Pigeonhouse Mountain.** The 3- to 4-hour walk to the top and back starts at a parking lot a 30-minute drive from Ulladulla. The going is steep at first, but

the trail levels out as it crosses a sandstone plateau. Another upward climb and you're rewarded with a magnificent view of peaks and ocean.

Several side roads worth exploring spur off between Ulladulla and Batemans Bay (see below). These lead to the tiny villages of Bawley Point and Kioloa, where holiday cottages nestle between isolated beaches, gum forests, and green patches studded with gray kangaroos.

There are more kangaroos at **Pebbly Beach** ★ in **Murramarang National Park** (✆ **02/4478 6582;** www.npws.nsw.gov.au), a short hop—20 minutes south—of Ulladulla. The furry creatures actually wander around the beach and adjacent campsite, or gather on the grassy dunes to graze. It's a good area for birding, too.

## ESSENTIALS

**GETTING THERE** Ulladulla is about a 3-hour drive from Sydney Central Business District down the Pacific Highway.

**VISITOR INFORMATION** **Ulladulla Visitors Centre,** Civic Center, Princes Highway (✆ **02/4455 1269;** www.shoalhaven.nsw.gov.au), is open Monday through Friday from 10am to 5pm, Saturday and Sunday from 9am to 5pm.

## ACCOMMODATIONS YOU CAN AFFORD

Ulladulla is well known for its food (particularly seafood and beef) and wine (there are a few boutique wineries in the area). For some of the best fish in Australia, head to one of the fish-and-chips shops on Wason Street, close to the harbor. The best is **Tiger Fish and Chips** (no phone). On the same street is **Torys Takeaway** (✆ **02/4454 0888**), where you can buy good fish and chips on the ground floor for about a third of the price at the very nice restaurant above (**Torys Seafood Restaurant;** open in the evenings; same number) and stroll down to the harbor to eat among the seagulls.

**Ulladulla Guest House** ★★★ This fabulous, award-winning property is one of the best places to stay in Australia. Run by the friendly Andrew and Elizabeth Nowosad—try and guess his accent—the Ulladulla Guest House is an impressive AAA-rated five-star establishment. It's surrounded by small but lovely tropical gardens—Andrew insists his coconut palms are the only ones this far south—and overlooks the harbor. Unusually, the house is also a registered art gallery, and the walls are festooned with paintings for sale. Past the cozy lounge are three types of rooms. Two self-contained units with private entrances to the garden are the lowest in price. The one-bedroom unit has a queen-size bed and a foldout sofa bed, and the two-bedroom unit has a double bed in one room, two singles in another, and a double foldout sofa bed in the lounge. Luxury rooms have a queen-size bed, custom-made furniture, and original artwork. Executive rooms come with a marble bathroom and a Jacuzzi. There are three masseurs on standby. In the rates listed below, peak periods are weekends, public holidays, Easter, and Christmas school holidays. The hotel prides itself on its food, too.

39 Burrill St., Ulladulla, NSW 2539. ✆ **02/4455 1796.** Fax 02/4454 4660. www.guesthouse.com.au. 10 units. Garden room A$188 (US$150); Luxury room A$208 (US$166); Family room or executive room A$248 (US$198). 2-night minimum on weekends. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant (3-course dinner A$50/US$40); lagoon-style heated outdoor pool; golf course nearby; exercise room; Jacuzzi; watersports equipment rental; bike rental; room service (7am–10pm); in-room massage; babysitting; free self-service laundry; laundry service; same-day dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, fax, dataport, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

## BATEMANS BAY

275km (171 miles) S of Sydney

This laid-back holiday town offers good surfing beaches, arts and crafts galleries, boat trips up the Clyde River, good game fishing, and bushwalks in the Morton and Deua national parks.

### ESSENTIALS

**GETTING THERE** Batemans Bay is a 3- to 4-hour drive from Sydney, depending on the traffic. (Avoid leaving Sydney at rush hour, and prepare for long delays on holidays.) **Premier Motor Service** (✆ **1300/368 100** in Australia, or 02/4423 5233) runs coaches to Batemans Bay from Sydney's Central Station.

**VISITOR INFORMATION** **Batemans Bay Visitor Information Centre,** at the corner of Princes Highway and Beach Road (✆ **1800/802 528** in Australia, or 02/4472 6800), is open daily from 9am to 5pm.

### A NICE PLACE TO STAY

**The Bay Soldiers Esplanade Motor Inn** ★ Kids This AAA-rated four-star motel right on the Batemans Bay river estuary has fabulous views and is close to the town center. Rooms are light and well furnished, and all have balconies (some with water views). Some doubles and suites have Jacuzzis; they cost the same as non-Jacuzzi rooms, so specify if you want one when booking. Eat at the hotel's restaurant or at the **Batemans Bay Soldiers' Club** (✆ **02/4472 4117;** www.baysoldiers.com.au), just opposite, which has a restaurant, a bistro, cheap drinks, and a free evening kids' club.

23 Beach Rd. (P.O. Box 202), Batemans Bay, NSW 2536. ✆ **1800/659 884** in Australia, or 02/4472 0200. Fax 02/4472 0277. www.esplanade.com.au. 23 units. A$107–A$179 (US$86–US$143) double; A$156–A$330 (US$125–US$264) suite. Extra person A$12 (US$9.60). Children under 18 stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; coin-op laundry; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, kitchenette, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

### GAME FISHING & A RIVER CRUISE

If you fancy some serious fishing, contact **OB1 Charters,** Marina, Beach Road, Batemans Bay (✆ **1800/641 065** in Australia, 02/4471 2738, or 0416/241 586 mobile; www.southcoast.com.au/ob1). The company runs full-day game-fishing trips and morning snapper-fishing trips (afternoon snapper trips in summer, too). Expect to encounter black marlin, blue marlin, giant kingfish, mako sharks, albacore tuna, yellowfin tuna, and blue tuna from November through June. The trip includes all tackle, bait, and afternoon and morning tea, but you must provide your own lunch. It costs A$900 (US$720) to hire the six-person boat for the day; if there are just a couple of you, the charter company may be able to fill the rest of the boat if you make reservations far enough in advance. Trips to catch snapper (a nice-tasting fish, which is not the same as red snapper) include all gear, bait, and morning or afternoon tea for A$80 (US$64); these last about 6 hours.

A river cruise on **MV *Merinda,*** Innes Boatshed, Orient Street, Batemans Bay (✆ **02/4472 4052;** fax 02/4472 4754), is a pleasant experience. The 3-hour cruise leaves at 11:30am daily and travels inland past townships, forests, and farmland. It costs A$22 (US$18) for adults, A$11 (US$8.80) for children, and A$50 (US$40) for families; a fish-and-chips lunch is A$6 (US$4.80) extra, and a seafood basket for two is A$12 (US$9.60).

## NAROOMA ★

345km (214 miles) SW of Sydney

Narooma is a seaside town with beautiful deserted beaches, a golf course right on a headland, a natural rock formation in the shape of Australia (popular with camera-wielding tourists), and excellent fishing. However, its major attraction is **Montague Island** ★★, the breeding colony for thousands of shearwaters (or mutton birds, as they're also called) and a hangout for juvenile seals.

Just 18km (11 miles) south is **Central Tilba** ★, one of the prettiest towns in Australia and the headquarters of the boutique ABC Cheese Factory. You'll kick yourself if you miss this charming township (pop. 35; 1 million visitors annually).

### ESSENTIALS

**GETTING THERE** Narooma is a 7-hour drive from Sydney down the Princes Highway. **Premier Motor Service** (✆ **1300/368 100** in Australia, or 02/4423 5233) runs coaches to Narooma from Sydney's Central Station.

**VISITOR INFORMATION** The **Narooma Visitors Centre,** Princes Highway, Narooma (✆ **02/4476 2881;** fax 02/4476 1690; www.naturecoast-tourism.com.au), is open daily from 9am to 5pm.

### ACCOMMODATIONS YOU CAN AFFORD

**Whale Motor Inn** ★ This nice, quiet motor inn has the best panoramic ocean views on the south coast and the largest rooms in town. Standard rooms have a queen-size bed and a single-person sofa bed. Standard suites have a separate bedroom, two sofa beds, and a kitchenette. Spacious executive and Jacuzzi suites are better furnished and have a kitchenette and a balcony or patio.

Princes Hwy., Narooma, NSW 2546. ✆ **02/4476 2411.** Fax 02/4476 1995. www.whalemotorinn.com.au. 17 units. A$90–A$145 (US$72–US$116). Extra person A$10 (US$8). AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; small unheated outdoor pool; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

### WHAT TO SEE & DO: WHALES, GOLF & MORE

A must if you're visiting the area is a boat tour with **Narooma Charters** (✆ **02/4476 2240;** www.naroomacharters.com.au). It offers spectacular tours of the coast on the lookout for dolphins, seal colonies, and little penguins, and also includes a tour of Montague Island. Morning and afternoon tours take 3½ hours and cost A$69 (US$55) for adults, A$50 (US$40) for children, and A$198 (US$158) for families. A 4½-hour tour includes some of the world's best whale-watching (between mid-Sept and early Dec) and costs A$89 (US$71) for adults, A$70 (US$56) for children, and A$299 (US$239) for families. The last time I went on this trip, I saw no fewer than eight humpback whales, some of them mothers with calves. An evening tour to see fairy penguins on Montague Island and a visit to the seal colony costs A$69 (US$55) for adults, A$50 (US$40) for children, and A$198 (US$158) for families. The company also offers game fishing from February to the end of June and scuba diving in the seal colonies from August to the end of December. You may also see giant fish-eating gray nurse sharks, dolphins, and even orcas. Dives cost A$66 (US$53) for a double dive, plus approximately A$33 (US$26) for gear rental.

**Narooma Golf Club,** Narooma (✆ **02/4476 2522**), has one of the most interesting and challenging coastal courses in Australia. A round will cost you A$25 (US$20).

While you're in the area, I recommend stopping off at the **Umbarra Aboriginal Cultural Centre** ★, Wallaga Lake, off the Princes Highway on Bermagui Road

(✆ **02/4473 7232;** umbarra@acr.net.au). It's 20km (12 miles) south of Narooma. The center offers activities such as boomerang throwing, spear throwing, and painting with natural ochers for A$6.25 (US$5) per person, or A$20 (US$16) per family. There are also discussions, Aboriginal archival displays, and a retail store. It's open Monday through Friday from 9am to 5pm, Saturday and Sunday from 9am to 4pm (closed Sun in winter). The center's guides also offer 2- to 4-hour four-wheel-drive/walking trips of nearby **Mount Dromedary** ★ and **Mumbulla Mountain,** taking in sacred sites. The tours cost A$45 (US$36) per person. Reservations are essential.

If you want to attempt Mount Dromedary without a guide, ask for directions in Narooma. The hike to the top takes around 3 hours.

## MERIMBULA

480km (298 miles) S of Sydney; 580km (360 miles) NE of Melbourne

This seaside resort (pop. approx. 7,000) is the last place of interest before the Princes Highway crosses the border into Victoria. Merimbula is a good center from which to discover the surrounding **Ben Boyd National Park** and **Mimosa Rocks National Park;** both offer bushwalking. Another park, **Bournda National Park,** surrounds a lake and has good walking trails and a surf beach.

Golf is the game of choice in Merimbula, and the area's most popular venue is the **Pambula-Merimbula Golf Club** (✆ **02/6495 6154**). You can spot kangaroos grazing on the fairways of the 27-hole course. It costs A$14 (US$11) for 9 holes or A$25 (US$20) for the day. Another favorite is **Tura Beach Country Club** (✆ **02/6495 9002**), which is known for its excellent coastal views. A round of 18 holes costs A$20 (US$16).

**Eden,** 20km (13 miles) south of Merimbula, was once a major whaling port. The rather gruesome **Eden Killer Whale Museum,** on Imlay Street in Eden (✆ **02/6496 2094**), is the only reason to stop here. It has a dubious array of relics, including boats, axes, and remnants of the area's last killer whale, called Old Tom. The museum is open Monday through Saturday from 9:15am to 3:45pm, Sunday from 11:15am to 3:45pm. In January it's open daily from 9:15am to 4:45pm. Admission is A$5.50 (US$4.40) for adults and A$1.50 (US$1.20) for children. You can still see a scattering of whales off the coast in October and November.

### ESSENTIALS

**GETTING THERE** The drive from either Sydney or Melbourne takes about 7 hours. The **Greyhound Australia** (✆ **13 14 99** in Australia, or 07/4690 9950; www.greyhound.com.au) bus trip from Sydney takes more than 8 hours.

**VISITOR INFORMATION** The **Merimbula Tourist Information Centre,** Beach Street, Merimbula (✆ **1800/150 457** in Australia, or 02/6495 1129; fax 02/6495 1250), is open daily from 9am to 5pm (10am–4pm in winter).

**SPECIAL EVENTS** Jazz fans should head for the **Merimbula Jazz Festival** held over the long Queens Birthday weekend, the second weekend in June. A country-music festival takes place the last weekend in October.

### ACCOMMODATIONS YOU CAN AFFORD

**Ocean View Motor Inn** This pleasant motel has good water views from 12 of its rooms (the best are nos. 9, 10, and 11). The rooms are spacious and modern, with plain brick walls, patterned carpets, and one long balcony serving the top six rooms.

Fourteen units have kitchenettes. All have showers. It's a friendly place. Breakfast is delivered to your room for A$7.70 (US$6.15) extra.

Merimbula Dr. and View St., Merimbula, NSW 2548. ✆ **02/6495 2300.** Fax 02/6495 3443. www.oceanviewmotorinn.com.au. 20 units. A$66–A$120 (US$53–US$96) double. Extra person A$11 (US$8.80). MC, V. **Amenities:** Medium-size solar-heated outdoor pool; limited room service; babysitting; coin-op laundry; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, kitchenette (in some), fridge, coffeemaker.

## 6 The Snowy Mountains: Australia's Ski Country ★

Thredbo: 519km (322 miles) SW of Sydney; 208km (129 miles) SW of Canberra; 543km (337 miles) NE of Melbourne

Made famous by Banjo Paterson's 1890 poem "The Man from Snowy River," the Snowy Mountains are most commonly used for what you'd least expect in Australia—skiing. It starts to snow around June and carries on until September. During this time hundreds of thousands of people flock here to ski at the Thredbo and Perisher Blue ski resorts and, to a lesser extent, Charlotte Pass and Mount Selwyn. It's certainly different skiing here, with ghostly white gum trees as the obstacles instead of pine trees.

The whole region is part of the **Kosciuszko** (pronounced ko-zi-*os*-co) **National Park,** the largest alpine area in Australia. During the summer months the park is a beautiful place for walking, and in spring the profusion of wildflowers is exquisite. A series of lakes in the area, including the one in the resort town of Jindabyne, are favorites with trout fishermen.

Visitors stay in **Jindabyne,** 62km (38 miles) south of Cooma, or **Thredbo Village,** 36km (22 miles) southwest of Jindabyne. Jindabyne is a bleak-looking resort town on the banks of the man-made Lake Jindabyne, which came into existence when the Snowy River was dammed to provide hydroelectric power.

Thredbo Village is in a valley of Mount Crackenback and resembles European-style resorts. From here, the Crackenback Chairlift provides access to an easy-grade pathway that leads to the top of Mount Kosciuszko, which at 2,228m (7,308 ft.) is Australia's highest peak. The mountain has stunning views of the alpine region and some good walks.

### SNOWY MOUNTAIN ESSENTIALS

**GETTING THERE** From Sydney, take the Eastern Distributor road toward Sydney Airport and turn right just before the planes, following the signs to Wollongong, and then Canberra, on the M5 motorway and the Hume Highway. Follow the Hume Highway south to Goulburn, where you turn onto the Federal Highway toward Canberra. From there take the Monaro Highway to Cooma, then follow the Alpine Way through Jindabyne and on to Thredbo. Tire chains may be necessary on the slopes in winter and can be rented from local service stations. The trip takes around 6 hours from Sydney with short breaks.

**Qantas** (✆ **13 13 13** in Australia, or 800/227-4500 in the U.S. and Canada) has daily flights from Sydney to Cooma. A connecting bus to the ski fields takes about 1 hour and operates from June through October. It's run by **Snowy Mountain Hire Cars** (✆ **02/6456 2957**) and costs A$48 (US$38) one-way.

In winter only (around June 19–Oct 5), **Greyhound Australia** (✆ **13 14 99** in Australia, or 07/4690 9950; www.greyhound.com.au) operates daily buses between Sydney and Cooma, via Canberra. The journey takes around 7 hours from Sydney and 3 hours from Canberra. A one-way ticket costs around A$50 (US$40).

**VISITOR INFORMATION** Pick up information about the ski fields and accommodations options at the **Cooma Visitors Centre,** 119 Sharp St., Cooma, NSW 2630

(✆ **02/6450 1740;** fax 02/6450 1798), or at the **Snowy Region Visitor Centre,** Kosciuszko Road, Jindabyne, NSW 2627 (✆ **02/6450 5600;** fax 02/6456 1249; srvc@npws.nsw.gov.au). A good website to browse is www.perisherblue.com.au.

## ACCOMMODATIONS YOU CAN AFFORD

You'll have to book months ahead to find a place during the ski season (especially on weekends). And don't expect to find a lot of bargains. The **Kosciuszko Accommodation Centre,** Nuggets Crossing, Jindabyne, NSW 2627 (✆ **1800/026 354** in Australia, or 02/6456 2022; fax 02/6456 2945), can help you find and book accommodations in the area. Other private agents who can help find you a spot for the night include the **Snowy Mountains Reservation Centre** (✆ **02/6456 2633**) and the **Thredbo Resort Centre** (✆ **1800/020 589** in Australia, or 02/6459 4294; www.thredbo.com.au). The Thredbo YHA (✆ **02/6457 6376;** www.yha.com.au) is a lovely place to stay if you're on a budget. Dorm beds cost A$32 (US$26) a night, and one of the three double rooms costs A$50 (US$40). You'll need to download and fill out a booking form from the website way in advance if you plan to stay here during the ski season.

### IN THREDBO

**Riverside Cabins** These self-contained studio and one-bedroom cabins sit above the Thredbo River and overlook the Crackenback Range. They're also a short walk from the Thredbo Alpine Hotel and local shops. Most rooms have balconies. Rates vary wildly from weekday to weekend and season to season.

Thredbo, NSW 2625. ✆ **02/6459 4196** in Australia, or 02/6459 4299. Fax 02/6459 4195. www.thredbo.com. 36 units. Winter A$160–A$516 (US$128–US$413) double; summer A$117–A$164 (US$94–US$131) double. Ask about weekly rates. AE, DC, MC, V. *In room:* TV, kitchen, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron, coin-op laundry.

**Thredbo Alpine Apartments** These apartments are very similar to the Riverside Cabins (see above) and are managed by the same people. All have balconies with mountain views. Some have queen-size beds. There's limited daily maid service and free in-room movies. Summer rates apply from July 30 through September 2.

Thredbo, NSW 2628. ✆ **1800/026 333** in Australia, or 02/6459 4299. Fax 02/6459 4195. 35 units. Winter weekends A$210–A$441 (US$168–US$353) 1-bedroom apt; A$289–A$628 (US$231–US$502) 2-bedroom apt; A$394–A$770 (US$315–US$616) 3-bedroom apt; weekday rates approx. 20% cheaper. Summer A$127–A$164 (US$102–US$131) 1-bedroom apt; A$159–A$190 (US$127–US$152) 2-bedroom apt; A$180–A$210 (US$144–US$168) 3-bedroom apt. Ask about weekly rates. AE, DC, MC, V. Covered parking. *In room:* TV, kitchen, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron, coin-op laundry.

### *Moments* In the Footsteps of the Man from Snowy River

**Horseback riding** is a popular activity for those wanting to ride like the "Man from Snowy River." **Reynella Kosciusko Rides,** in Adamanaby, 44km (27 miles) northwest of Cooma (✆ **1800/029 909** in Australia, or 02/6454 2386; fax 02/6454 2530; www.reynellarides.com.au), offers multinight rides through the Kosciuszko National Park from October to the end of April. Three-day, four-night rides cost around A$799 (US$639), and the 5-day, 6-night ride A$1,207 (US$966). Transfers from Cooma cost around A$35 (US$28) each way. The trips are all-inclusive and include camping and homestead accommodations. Shorter rides are offered by **Jindabyne Trail Rides** (✆ **02/6456 2421;** fax 02/6456 1254). Gentle, 1½-hour rides on the slopes above Jindabyne cost A$25 (US$20) per person.

### Tips Ski Condition Updates

For up-to-date ski field information, call the **Snowy Region Visitor Centre (✆ 02/6450 5600)**.

**Thredbo Alpine Hotel** After the skiing is finished for the day, the center of activity in Thredbo is this large resort-style lodge. Rooms vary; those on the top floor of the three-story hotel have a king-size bed instead of a standard queen-size. The rooms are all wood-paneled and have free in-house movies. Thredbo's only nightclub is here.

P.O. Box 80, Thredbo, NSW 2625. ✆ **02/6459 4200.** Fax 02/6459 4201. www.thredbo.com.au. 65 units. Winter A$198–A$498 (US$158–US$398) double; summer A$129–A$189 (US$103–US$151) double. Rates include breakfast. Ask about weekly rates and packages. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; bistro; 4 bars; heated outdoor pool; golf course nearby; 3 lit tennis courts; Jacuzzi; sauna; tour desk; room service (winter only); massage; coin-op laundry; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* TV/VCR, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer.

## HITTING THE SLOPES & OTHER ADVENTURES

Obviously, skiing is the most popular activity here. More than 50 ski lifts serve the fields of Perisher Valley, Mount Blue Cow, Smiggins Holes, and Guthega. Perisher Valley offers the best overall slopes; Mount Blue Cow is generally very crowded; Smiggins Holes offer good slopes for beginners; and Guthega has nice light, powdery snow and is less crowded. Thredbo has some very challenging runs and the longest downhill runs, but I prefer Perisher for atmosphere. A day's ski pass costs around A$87 (US$70) for adults, A$48 (US$38) for children 6 to 14. If you go by car you'll have to pay a park admission fee of A$16 (US$13).

A ski-tube train midway between Jindabyne and Thredbo on the Alpine Way travels through the mountains to Perisher Valley and then to Blue Cow. (A "ski-tube train" is a train that goes through a mountain tunnel.) It costs A$34 (US$27) return for adult skiers and A$19 (US$15) for child skiers. Ski gear can be rented at numerous places in Jindabyne and Thredbo.

In summer, the region is popular for hiking, canoeing, fishing, and golf. Thredbo Village has tennis courts, a 9-hole golf course, and mountain-bike trails.

# 7 Outback New South Wales

The Outback is a powerful Australian image. Hot, dusty, and prone to flies, it can also be a romantic place where wedge-tailed eagles float in the shimmering heat as you spin in a circle, tracing the unbroken horizon. If you drive out here, you have to be constantly on the lookout for emus, large flightless birds that dart across roads open-beaked and wide-eyed. When you turn off the car engine, it's so quiet you can hear the scales of a sleepy lizard, as long as your forearm, scraping the rumpled track as it turns to taste the air with its long, blue tongue.

The scenery is a huge canvas with a restricted palette: blood red for the dirt, straw yellow for the blotches of Mitchell grass, searing blue for the surreally large sky. There is room to be yourself in the Outback, and you'll soon find that personalities often tilt toward the eccentric. It's a hardworking place, too, where miners and sheep and cattle farmers try to eke out a living in Australia's hard center.

## BROKEN HILL ★★

1,157km (717 miles) W of Sydney; 508km (315 miles) NE of Adelaide

At heart, Broken Hill—or "Silver City," as it's been nicknamed—is still very much a hardworking, hard-drinking mining town. Its beginnings date to 1883, when the trained eye of a boundary rider named Charles Rasp noticed something odd about the craggy rock outcrops at a place called the Broken Hill. He thought he saw deposits of tin, but they turned out to be silver and lead. Today, the city's main drag, Argent Street, bristles with finely crafted colonial mansions, heritage homes, hotels, and public buildings. Look deeper and you see the town's quirkiness. Around one corner you'll find the radio station, built to resemble a giant wireless set with round knobs for windows, and around another, the headquarters of the Housewives Association, which ruled the town with an iron apron for generations. Then there's Mario's Palace Hotel—made famous in the movie *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*—with its high painted walls and a mural of Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* on the ceiling two flights up.

Traditionally a hard-drinking but religious town, Broken Hill has 23 pubs (down from 73 in its heyday) and plenty of churches, as well as a Catholic cathedral, a synagogue, and a mosque to serve its 21,000 inhabitants.

### ESSENTIALS

**GETTING THERE** By car, take the Great Western Highway from Sydney to Dubbo, then the Mitchell Highway to the Barrier Highway, which will take you to Broken Hill. **Southern Australian Airlines** (book through Qantas, ✆ **13 13 13** in Australia, or 800/227-4500 in the U.S. and Canada) also connects Broken Hill to Adelaide, Melbourne, and Mildura.

The ***Indian Pacific*** train stops here on its way from Sydney to Perth twice a week. It takes nearly 16 hours, leaving Sydney at 2:55pm on Saturday and Wednesday and arrives in Broken Hill at 6:45am the next day. The fare from Sydney is A$430 (US$344) for adults and A$349 (US$279) for children in a first-class sleeper, A$340 (US$272) for adults and A$259 (US$207) for children in an economy sleeper, and A$163 (US$130) for adults and A$82 (US$66) for children in an economy seat. Contact **Great Southern Railways** (✆ **08/8213 4530;** www.gsr.com.au) for timetables, fares, bookings, and more information.

**Greyhound Australia** (✆ **13 14 99** in Australia, or 07/4690 9950; www.greyhound.com.au) runs buses from Adelaide for A$58 (US$46); the trip takes 7 hours. The 16-hour trip from Sydney costs from A$93 (US$74).

**VISITOR INFORMATION** The **Broken Hill Visitors Information Centre,** Blende and Bromide streets, Broken Hill, NSW 2880 (✆ **08/8087 6077;** fax 08/8088 5209; www.murrayoutback.org.au), is open daily from 8:30am to 5pm. The **National Parks & Wildlife Service (NPWS)** office is at 183 Argent St. (✆ **08/8088 5933**), and the **Royal Automobile Association of South Australia,** which offers reciprocal services to other national and international auto-club members, is at 261 Argent St. (✆ **08/8088 4999**).

***Note:*** The area code in Broken Hill is **08,** the same as the South Australia code, not 02, the New South Wales code.

**GETTING AROUND** **Silver City Tours,** 380 Argent St. (✆ **08/8087 3144**), conducts tours of the city and surrounding Outback. City tours take around 4 hours and cost A$45 (US$36) for adults and A$20 (US$16) for children. The company also offers a range of other tours of the area.

**Hertz** (✆ **08/8087 2719;** fax 08/8087 4838) rents four-wheel-drive vehicles suitable for exploring the area.

## ACCOMMODATIONS YOU CAN AFFORD: ABOVEGROUND & BELOW

One option is to rent a local cottage from **Broken Hill Historic Cottages** (✆ **08/8087 9966**) for A$80 (US$64) a night. **The Tourist Lodge YHA** (✆ **08/8088 2086;** www.yha.com.au) is a nice YHA hostel with a couple of smaller dorms and 25 double rooms. Dorm beds cost A$22 (US$18), twin rooms cost A$44 (US$35), and doubles cost A$50 (US$40). All share bathrooms.

**Broken Hill Overlander Motor Inn** This is my favorite place to stay in Broken Hill, although admittedly that's not really saying much in this Outback town. It's set way back from the road, has nice green areas and barbecue facilities, and is very quiet. The more expensive AAA-rated four-star rooms are much nicer than the cheaper options and considerably larger. Two family rooms sleep up to six in a combination of single and queen-size beds. You can order off several menus supplied by local restaurants; the hotel supplies plates and cutlery.

142 Iodide St., Broken Hill, NSW 2880. ✆ **08/8088 2566,** or reserve through Best Western (✆ **800/780-7234** in the U.S. and Canada, 0800/39 3130 in the U.K., 0800/237 893 in New Zealand, or 13 17 79 in Australia). Fax 08/8088 4377. www.bestwestern.com.au/overlander. 15 units. A$85–A$135 (US$68–US$108) double; A$135 (US$108) 2-bed unit. Extra person A$10 (US$8). AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Small heated outdoor pool; sauna; tour desk; laundry service; dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

**Mario's Palace Hotel** *Value* With its high painted walls, a mural of Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* on the ceiling two flights up, and an office crammed with stuffed animal heads and crabs, the Palace Hotel is an intriguing sanctuary. The owners have put a lot of work into restoring the place. The more expensive doubles are larger and come with a small lounge area, but all are comfortable and cool. Ten double rooms come with an attached shower. The Priscilla Suite is famous because that's where the transvestites stayed in *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert.* Mario owned the place for "donkey's years," as he says; he's now retired, and his family runs the hotel.

227 Argent St., Broken Hill, NSW 2880. ✆ **08/8088 1699.** Fax 08/8087 6240. mariospalace@bigpond.com. 51 units, 10 with bathroom. A$44 (US$35) double without bathroom, A$53–A$70 (US$42–US$56) double with bathroom; Priscilla suite A$90 (US$72) for 2. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Bar; dining room. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, coffeemaker, iron.

**Underground Motel** ★★ I love this place; it's worth making the trip out to White Cliffs just to stay here. All but two of the rooms are underground; they're reached by a maze of spacious tunnels dug out of the rock and sealed with epoxy resin to keep out the damp and the dust. The temperature below ground is a constant 72°F (22°C), which is decidedly cooler than a summer day outside. Rooms are comfortable though basic, with shared toilets and showers. Turn the light off, and it's dark as a cave. Every night guests sit around large tables and dig into the roast of the day. (Vegetarians have options, too.) The three-course meal costs A$25 (US$20).

Smiths Hill, White Cliffs (P.O. Box 427), NSW 2836. ✆ **1800/021 154** in Australia, or 08/8091 6677. Fax 08/8091 6654. 30 units, none with bathroom. A$83 (US$66) double. Extra person A$24 (US$19). MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; small heated outdoor pool; coin-op laundry; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* No phone.

## WHERE TO DINE

The best place for a meal Aussie-style is a local club. In Broken Hill, you'll find one of the best bistros at the **Barrier Social & Democratic Club,** 218 Argent St. (✆ **08/8088 4477**). It serves breakfast, lunch, and dinner. There's also a host of Chinese

restaurants around town. The **Oceania Chinese Restaurant,** Argent Street (✆ **08/8087 3695**), has cheap lunch specials.

## EXPLORING THE TOWN: GALLERIES, A MINE TOUR & THE WORLD'S LARGEST SCHOOLROOM

With the largest regional public gallery in New South Wales and 27 private **galleries,** Broken Hill has more places per capita to see art than anywhere else in Australia. The **Broken Hill Regional Art Gallery,** Chloride Street, between Blende and Beryl streets (✆ **08/8088 5491**), houses an extensive collection of Australian colonial and Impressionist works. Look for the *Silver Tree,* a sculpture created out of the pure silver mined beneath Broken Hill. This is also a good place to see works by the "Brushmen of the Bush," a well-known group of artists, including Pro Hart, Jack Absalom, Eric Minchin, and Hugh Schultz, who spend many days sitting around campfires in the bush trying to capture its essence in paint. The gallery is open Monday through Friday from 10am to 5pm, and Saturday and Sunday from 1 to 5pm. Admission is A$3 (US$2.40) for adults, A$2 (US$1.60) for children, and A$6 (US$4.80) for families.

Other galleries worth visiting around town include **Absalom's Gallery,** 638 Chapple St. (✆ **08/8087 5881**), and the **Pro Hart Gallery,** 108 Wyman St. (✆ **08/8087 2441**). Both are open daily. Pro Hart's gallery is really worth a look. Apart from his own works—including pieces based on incidents and scenes relating to Broken Hill—his gallery is crammed with everything from a bas-relief of Salvador Dalí to a landscape by Claude Monet.

To get a real taste of mining in Broken Hill, take an underground tour at **Delprat's Mine** (✆ **08/8088 1604**). Visitors go 120m (394 ft.) below the surface. Children under 6 are not allowed. Tours run Monday through Friday at 10:30am and Saturday at 2pm. The 2-hour tour costs A$23 (US$18) for adults and A$18 (US$14) for children.

Be sure not to miss the School of the Air and the Royal Flying Doctor Service base, both of which help show the enormity of the Australian interior. The **School of the Air**—the largest schoolroom in the world, with students scattered over 800,000 sq. km (312,000 sq. miles)—conducts lessons via two-way radios. Visitors can listen in on part of the day's first teaching session Monday through Friday at 8:30am (except public holidays). Bookings are essential and must be made through the **Broken Hill Visitors Information Centre** (see "Visitor Information," above). Tours costs A$3.50 (US$2.80) for adults and A$2.50 (US$2) for kids. The **Royal Flying Doctor Service base** is at the Broken Hill Airport (✆ **08/8080 1777**). The service maintains communication with more than 400 outback stations, ready to fly at once in case of an emergency. The base at Broken Hill covers 25% of New South Wales, as well as parts of Queensland and South Australia. Explanations of the role of the flying doctor service run continuously at the base Monday through Friday from 9am to 5pm. Admission is A$5.50 (US$4.40) for adults and A$2.75 (US$2.20) for children.

### What Time Is It, Anyway?

Broken Hill runs its clocks on Central Standard Time, to correspond with South Australia. The surrounding country, however, runs half an hour faster at Eastern Standard Time.

### *Finds* A Fabulous Place to Enjoy the Sunset

Just outside Broken Hill in the **Living Desert Nature Park** is the best collection of sculptures this side of Stonehenge. Twelve sandstone obelisks, up to 3m (10 ft.) high and carved totemlike by artists from as far away as Georgia, Syria, Mexico, and the Tiwi Islands, make up the Sculpture Symposium. Surrounding them on all sides is brooding *mulga* scrub. It's fantastic at sunset.

## OTHER THINGS TO SEE & DO NEARBY

**VISITING A GHOST TOWN** At least 44 movies have been filmed in the Wild West town of **Silverton** ★ (pop. 50), 23km (14 miles) northwest of Broken Hill. It's the Wild West Australian-style, though, with camels instead of horses sometimes placed in front of the **Silverton Pub,** which is well worth a visit for its kitschy Australian appeal. Silverton once had a population of 3,000, following the discovery of silver here in 1882, but within 7 years almost everyone had left. There are some good art galleries here, as well as a restored jail and hotel.

**DISCOVERING ABORIGINAL HANDPRINTS** **Mutawintji National Park** ★ (also known and pronounced by its old name, Mootwingee), 130km (81 miles) northeast of Broken Hill, was one of the most important spiritual meeting places for Aborigines on the continent. Groups came from all over to peck out abstract engravings on the rocks with sharpened quartz tools and to sign their handprints to show they belonged to the place. The ancient fireplaces are still here, laid out like a giant map to show where each visiting group came from. Hundreds of ocher outlines of hands and animal paws, some up to 30,000 years old, are stenciled on rock overhangs. The fabulous 2-hour Outback trip from Broken Hill to Mootwingee is along red-dirt tracks suitable only for 4WDs. It should not be attempted after a heavy rain.

**Mootwingee Heritage Tours** (✆ **08/8088 7000**) organizes inspections of the historical sites every Wednesday and Saturday at 10:30am Broken Hill time (11am Mootwingee, or Eastern Standard, time). The tours may be canceled in very hot weather. The **NPWS office** at 183 Argent St. in Broken Hill (✆ **08/8088 5933**) also has details. You can camp at the **Homestead Creek** campground for A$11 (US$8.80) a night. It has its own water supply.

**EXPLORING WHITE CLIFFS** ★★ White Cliffs, 290km (180 miles) east of Broken Hill, is an opal-mining town that's bigger than it looks. To escape the summer heat, most houses are built underground in mine shafts, where the temperature is a constant 72°F (22°C). Unlike Lightning Ridge (see below), which produces mainly black opals, White Cliffs is known for its less valuable white opals—as is Coober Pedy in South Australia (see chapter 11). Prospecting started in 1889, when kangaroo shooters found the colorful stones on the ground. A year later the rush was on, and by the turn of the 20th century about 4,000 people were digging and sifting in a lawless, waterless hell of a place. White Cliffs is smaller than Coober Pedy and less touristy—which is its great charm. You also have more freedom to wander around the old opal tailings here, which is discouraged in Coober Pedy. Given the choice between White Cliffs and Lightning Ridge, I'd opt for the latter, but if you have time, see both.

The countryside here looks like an inverted moonscape, pimpled with bone-white heaps of gritty clay dug from the 50,000 mine shafts that surround the town. These

days, White Cliffs is renowned for its eccentricity. Take **Jock's Place,** for instance, an underground museum full to the beams with junk pulled from old mine shafts. Then there's a house made of beer flagons, and a 9-hole **dirt golf course** where locals play at night with fluorescent green balls.

If you fancy an after-hours round of golf in the dirt (and who doesn't?), contact the secretary of the **White Cliffs Golf Club,** John Painter (✆ **08/8091 6715** after hours). He'll be happy to supply you with a golf club or two and a couple of balls for A$2 (US$1.60). If you have your own clubs, put A$2 (US$1.60) in the black box at the first tee—but be warned, bush playing can damage your clubs, and crows often make off with the balls. Visitors can play day or night; if you want some company, come on Sunday, when club members shoot it out.

## LIGHTNING RIDGE: OPALS GALORE ★★

793 (492 miles) NW of Sydney; 737km (457 miles) SW of Brisbane

Lightning Ridge, or "The Ridge" as the locals call it, is perhaps the most fascinating place to visit in all of New South Wales. Essentially, it's a hardworking opal-mining town stuck out in the arid northern reaches of New South Wales—where summer temperatures hover around the 113°F (45°C) mark. Lightning Ridge thrives off the largest deposit of black opals in the world. Good-quality opals can fetch a miner around A$8,000 (US$6,400) per carat, and stones worth upwards of A$500,000 (US$400,000) each are not unheard of. Tourists come to get a taste of life in Australia's Wild West. A popular tourist activity in the opal fields is to pick over the old heaps of mine tailings. Stories (perhaps tall tales) abound of tourists finding overlooked opals worth thousands.

I strongly recommend you visit the **Grawin** and **Glengarry opal fields** ★★, both about an hour or so from Lightning Ridge on a dirt track suitable for two-wheel-drive cars in dry weather only. (Check with the Lightning Ridge Tourist Information Centre before you go.) Bristling with drills and hoists pulling out bucketloads of dirt, these frontier townships buzz with news of the latest opal rush. If you can convince a local to take you there, all the better—the tracks can be misleading. **Ando's Outback Tours** (see "Byron Bay: A Beach Bohemia," earlier in this chapter) takes in Glengarry and Lightning Ridge on its 5-day trip.

### ESSENTIALS

**GETTING THERE** From Sydney, it takes about 9 hours to drive to Lightning Ridge, via Bathurst, Dubbo, and the fascinating town of Walgett. **Airlink** (✆ **02/6884 2435**) flies to Lightning Ridge from Sydney via Dubbo.

**VISITOR INFORMATION** The **Lightning Ridge Tourist Information Centre,** Morilla Street (P.O. Box 1779), Lightning Ridge, NSW 2834 (✆ **02/6829 0565;** fax 02/6829 0565), is open Monday through Friday from 8:30am to 4pm. On weekends, call ✆ **02/6829 0429** or e-mail lridge@walgettshire.com.

**SPECIAL EVENTS** If you're in Australia around Easter, make sure you come to Lightning Ridge for the **Great Goat Race** and the rodeo. A decent website for information is www.lightningridge.net.au.

### ACCOMMODATIONS YOU CAN AFFORD

An interesting addition to the Lightning Ridge lodging scene is the **Lightning Ridge Hotel/Motel** (✆ **02/6829 0304;** www.lightning-ridge-hotel-motel.com), set on 4 hectares (10 acres) of bush, complete with a birdbath to attract the native parrots. There are 40 log cabins here, as well as a trailer park (for your own trailer or motor

home) and camping sites. Cabins cost A$56 (US$45) without bathroom, A$58 (US$46) with a bathroom; motel rooms go for A$77 (US$62) double, A$87 (US$70) triple, and A$145 (US$116) quad. If you want to stay at the Glengarry opal fields, your only option is the **Glengarry Hilton,** a rustic outback pub (not associated with the major hotel chain). Here you stay in mobile units sleeping 24. A night costs A$15 (US$12) per person.

**The Wallangulla Motel** My choice of the motels in town, The Wallangulla offers two standards of rooms, the cheaper ones in an older section of the property. Newer rooms are better furnished and generally nicer; they're worth the extra money. Two family rooms each have two bedrooms and a living room; one has a Jacuzzi. Guests can use the barbecue facilities. The Lightning Ridge Bowling Club across the road has a restaurant with pretty good food and a very cheap bistro; motel guests can charge meals to their room bills.

Morilla St. (at Agate St.), Lightning Ridge, NSW 2834. ✆ **02/6829 0542.** Fax 02/6829 0070. www.wj.com.au/wallangulla. 43 units. A$60–A$100 (US$48–US$80) double; A$80–A$115 (US$64–US$92) triple; A$90–A$125 (US$72–US$100) family room with Jacuzzi. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Coin-op laundry; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, coffeemaker.

## SEEING THE TOWN

Any visit to Lightning Ridge should start with an orientation trip with **Black Opal Tours** (✆ **02/6829 0368;** fax 02/6829 1206; blackopaltours.com). The company offers 3-hour morning and afternoon tours for A$25 (US$20) for adults and A$22 (US$18) for kids.

Among the many points of interest is the 15m-tall (49-ft.) homemade **Amigo's Castle,** which dominates the opal fields surrounding the modern township of Lightning Ridge. Complete with turrets, battlements, dungeons, and a wishing well, the castle has been rising out of these arid lands for the past 18 years, with every rock scavenged from the surrounding area and lugged in a wheelbarrow or in a rucksack on Amigo's back. The wonderful Amigo hasn't taken out insurance on the property, so there are no official tours, though if he feels like a bit of company he'll show you around.

The **Artesian Bore Baths,** 2km (1¼ miles) from the post office on Pandora Street, are free, open 24 hours a day, and said to have therapeutic value. The water temperature hovers between 104°F and 122°F (40°C–50°C). A visit at night when the stars are out is amazing.

The **Bevan's Black Opal & Cactus Nursery** (✆ **02/6829 0429**) contains more than 2,000 species of cactus and succulent plants, including rare specimens. Betty Bevan cuts opals from the family's mine, and many are on display. Admission is A$5 (US$4) to the cactus nursery, free to see the opals.

Lightning Ridge has plenty of opal shops, galleries, walk-in opal mines, and other unique things to see. You might want to take a look at **Gemopal Pottery** (✆ **02/6829 0375**), on the road to the Bore Baths. The resident potter makes some nice pots out of clay mine tailings and lives in one of his five old Sydney railway carriages.

# 6

# Brisbane

*by Lee Mylne*

Queensland's capital, along the banks of the wide brown Brisbane River, is relaxed and laid-back. The city has grown up in recent years, assured of its attractions and confident of its appeal. It's one of those places that people don't always appreciate until they spend some time there but that gives a welcome as warm as the weather. Green and leafy, it has huge Moreton Bay fig trees to give shade, and in the summer the purple haze of jacarandas competes with the blaze of poinciana trees in bloom. Palm trees sway, and a mango tree in the backyard is almost *de rigeur*.

Major tourist attractions such as theme parks are all south of the city in the Brisbane–Gold Coast corridor. Brisbane folk don't see that as a drawback. They'll urge you not only to discover the delights of a city rich in history and character but to get to know the locals. It's easy, as Queenslanders will strike up a conversation with just about anyone.

Brisbane (pronounced *Briz*-bun) is renowned for its timber Queenslander cottages and houses, set high on stumps to catch the breeze, with wide, shady verandas. In some inner city sections, Queenslanders have been converted to cafes and restaurants, or into shops.

In the city center, gracious colonial sandstone buildings stand next to modern glass towers. Wander in the city botanic gardens, in-line skate or bike along the riverfront, have a cool drink in a pub beer garden, or get out on the river on a CityCat high-speed ferry. There are several bridges across the river, the most famous and attractive being the Story Bridge. Take a stroll across the new Goodwill Bridge, for pedestrians and cyclists only, from South Bank to the City Gardens. On weekends, browse in the handicraft markets, listen to the buskers, and people-watch. You can even cool off at a man-made beach. There's a lot of free entertainment and plenty to keep you busy. Getting around is cheap, good food—including fantastic seafood—is abundant, and accommodations are affordable, especially in some comfortable and elegant bed-and-breakfasts.

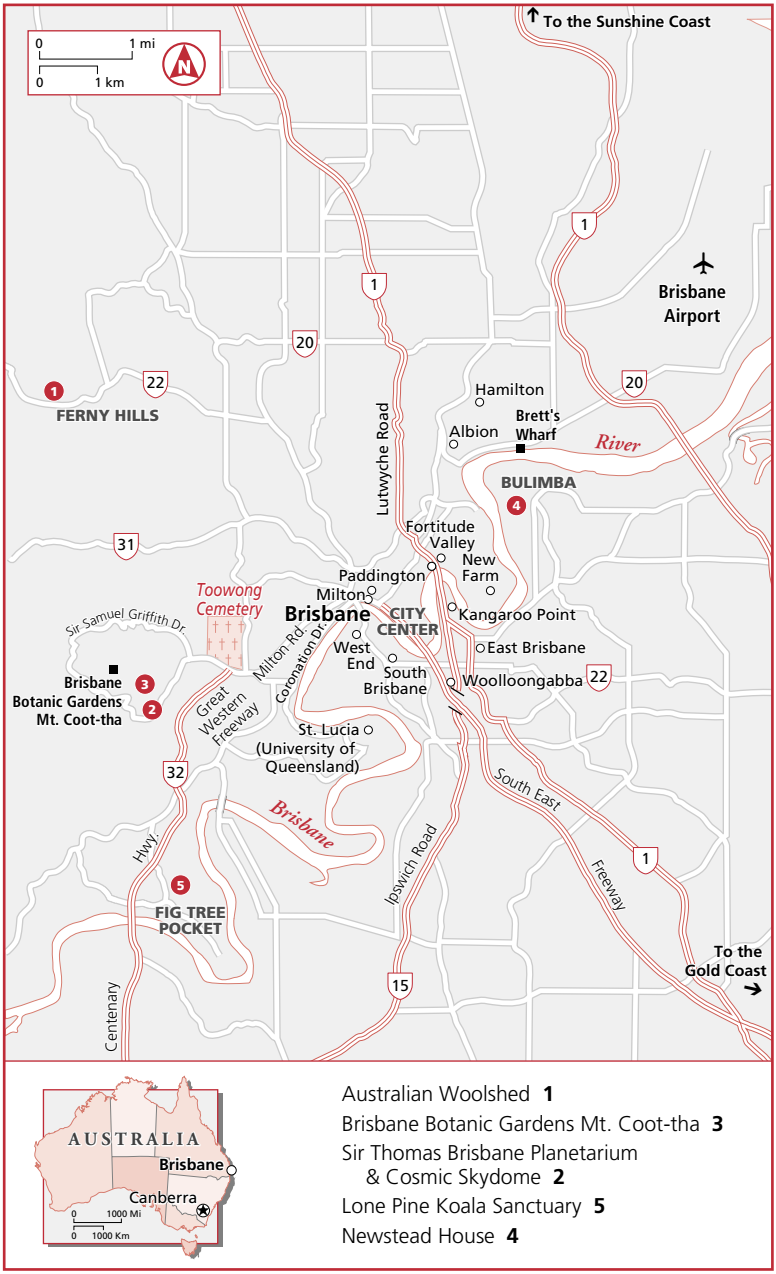
Brisbane is located on the southern end of the state's eastern seaboard, with the Sunshine Coast less than 2 hours drive to the north and the Gold Coast an hour to the south. The Brisbane River flows into Moreton Bay, which is dotted with islands that offer their own delights.

## 1 Orientation

### ARRIVING

**BY PLANE** About 20 international airlines serve Brisbane from Europe, Asia, and New Zealand, including Qantas, Air New Zealand, Pacific Blue, Singapore Airlines, Thai International, Malaysia Airlines, and Cathay Pacific. From North America, you can fly direct from Los Angeles to Brisbane on Qantas, but from other places you will

# Greater Brisbane




Australian Woolshed **1**

Brisbane Botanic Gardens Mt. Coot-tha **3**

Sir Thomas Brisbane Planetarium & Cosmic Skydome **2**

Lone Pine Koala Sanctuary **5**

Newstead House **4**

### The Train from the Plane

**Airtrain** (✆ **07/3211 2855;** www.airtrain.com.au), a rail link between the city and Brisbane's domestic and international airport terminals, runs daily every 15 minutes from 5am to 9pm, with fares from the airport to city stations costing A$10 (US$8) for the first adult, A$5 (US$4) for the first child (ages 4–14), with discounts for each additional person in your group (for example, five or more adults pay A$6/US$4.80 each). The trip takes about 20 minutes. Airtrain also links the airport with the Gold Coast.

likely fly to Sydney and connect on Qantas, or fly direct from Auckland, New Zealand.

**Qantas** (✆ **13 13 13** in Australia, or 800/227-4500 in the U.S. and Canada; www.qantas.com.au) and its subsidiary **Qantaslink** (book through Qantas) operates daily flights from state capitals, Cairns, Townsville, and several other regional towns. No-frills **Virgin Blue** (✆ **13 67 89** in Australia, or 07/3295 2296; www.virginblue.com.au) offers cheaper fares and service from all capital cities as well as Cairns, Townsville, Proserpine in the Whitsundays, Mackay, Rockhampton, and the Gold Coast in Queensland; Coffs Harbour and Newcastle in New South Wales; and Hobart in Tasmania. **Jetstar** (✆ **13 15 38** in Australia, or 03/8341 4901; www.jetstar.com.au) has daily service from Proserpine, Hamilton Island, Melbourne's Avalon Airport, and Hobart and Launceston in Tasmania.

**Brisbane International Airport** is 16km (10 miles) from the city, and the domestic terminal is 2km (1¼ miles) farther away. The arrivals floor, on Level 2, has an information desk to meet all flights, help with flight inquiries, dispense tourist information, and make hotel bookings, and a check-in counter for passengers transferring to domestic flights.

**Travelex** currency-exchange bureaus are on the departures and arrivals floors. **Avis** (✆ **07/3860 4200**), **Budget** (✆ **07/3860 4466**), **Europcar** (✆ **07/3874 8150**), **Hertz** (✆ **07/3860 4522**), and **Thrifty** (✆ **1300/367 227**) have desks on Level 2; in the airport there is also a free-call board connecting you to smaller local car-rental companies that sometimes offer better rates. Free showers and baby-changing rooms are on Levels 2, 3, and 4; Level 4 has an ATM.

The domestic terminal has a Travelex currency-exchange bureau, showers, and desks run by the four big car-rental agencies. (Call the telephone numbers above.)

For security reasons, luggage lockers are not available at either terminal.

**Coachtrans** (✆ **07/3238 4700;** www.coachtrans.com.au) runs a shuttle between the airport and Roma Street Transit Centre every 30 minutes from 5am to 11pm. The one-way cost is A$9 (US$7.20) or A$11 (US$8.80) for hotel drop-off. The round-trip fare is A$15 (US$12) or A$17 (US$14). One-way family tickets are A$24 (US$19) or A$29 (US$23). The trip takes about 40 minutes, and reservations are not needed. No public buses serve the airport. A **taxi** to the city costs around A$20 (US$16) from the international terminal and A$25 (US$20) from the domestic terminal, plus A$2 (US$1.60) for departing taxis.

**BY TRAIN** **Queensland Rail** (✆ **13 22 32** in Queensland; www.qr.com.au) operates several long-distance trains to Brisbane from Cairns. The fast Tilt Train takes about 25 hours and costs A$295 (US$236) for business class. The slower *Sunlander*

takes 32 hours and costs A$197 (US$158) for a sitting berth, A$253 (US$202) for an economy-class sleeper, A$398 (US$318) for a first-class sleeper, or A$725 (US$580) for the all-inclusive Queenslander class. **Countrylink** (✆ **13 22 32** in Australia, or 02/8202 2000; www.countrylink.info) runs daily train service to Brisbane from Sydney. The 14-hour trip costs A$115 to A$162 (US$92–US$130) in a sitting berth, and A$243 (US$194) for a sleeper. Be sure to book the through (all-train) service; on some runs, passengers must transfer to a coach (bus) in Murwillumbah, south of the border, tacking 2 hours onto the trip. This train-coach service has no sleepers.

All intercity and interstate trains pull into the city center's **Brisbane Transit Centre at Roma Street,** often called the Roma Street Transit Centre. From here, most city and Spring Hill hotels are a few blocks' walk or a quick cab ride away. The station has food outlets, showers, tourist information, and lockers.

**Queensland Rail Citytrain** (✆ **13 12 30** in Queensland, or 07/3606 5555; www.citytrain.com.au) provides daily train service from the Sunshine Coast and plentiful service from the Gold Coast.

**BY BUS** All intercity and interstate coaches pull into the Brisbane Transit Centre (see "By Train," above). **Greyhound Australia** (✆ **13 14 99** in Australia, or 07/4690 9950; www.greyhound.com.au) serves the city several times daily. A one-way Cairns-Brisbane ticket costs A$201 (US$161); the trip takes 30 hours. The Sydney-Brisbane trip takes 17 hours and costs A$100 (US$80) one-way. Coachtrans (✆ **07/3238 4700;** www.coachtrans.com.au) provides daily service from the Gold Coast. Call **TransInfo** (✆ **13 12 30** in Queensland, or 07/3215 5000**;** http://transinfo.com.au) for details.

**BY CAR** The Bruce Highway from Cairns enters the city from the north. The Pacific Highway enters Brisbane from Sydney in the south.

## VISITOR INFORMATION

**Brisbane Marketing** has an info booth (✆ **07/3006 6290**) in the Queen Street Mall at Albert Street, open from 9am to 5:30pm Monday through Thursday, to 7pm or later Friday, and 4pm Saturday; Sunday it's open from 10am to 4pm. The Roma Street Transit Centre is another source of info (✆ **07/3236 2020**). The Brisbane City Council's website at www.ourbrisbane.com is a good source of information.

The free weekly *Brisbane News,* available in newsstands, cafes, hotel lobbies, and information booths, is a great source of information on dining, entertainment, performing arts, galleries, shopping, and Brisbane's laid-back lifestyle.

## CITY LAYOUT

The city center's office towers shimmer in the sun on the north bank of a curve of the Brisbane River. In the tip of the curve are the lush Brisbane City Gardens. The 30m (98-ft.) sandstone cliffs of Kangaroo Point rise on the eastern side of the south bank; to the west are the South Bank Parklands and the Queensland Cultural Centre, known as South Bank. The Goodwill Bridge (for pedestrians only) links South Bank with the City Gardens. To the west 5km (3 miles), Mt. Coot-tha (pronounced *Coo*-tha) looms out of the flat plain, providing a great vantage point for gazing over the city.

**MAIN ARTERIES & STREETS** It's easy to find your way around central Brisbane once you know all the east-west streets are named after female British royalty, and all the north-south streets are named after their male counterparts. The most northerly is Ann, followed by Adelaide, Queen, Elizabeth, Charlotte, Mary, Margaret, and Alice.

From east to west, the streets are Edward, Albert, George, and William, which runs into North Quay, flanking the river's northeast bank.

Queen Street, the main thoroughfare, becomes a pedestrian mall between Edward and George streets. Roma Street exits the city diagonally to the northwest. Ann Street leads all the way east into Fortitude Valley. The main street in Fortitude Valley is Brunswick Street, which runs right into New Farm.

**STREET MAPS** **The Brisbane Map,** free from Brisbane Marketing (see "Visitor Information," above) or your concierge, is a lightweight map that shows the river and outlying suburbs, as well as the city. It's great for drivers because it shows parking lots and one-way traffic directions on the confusing city-center grid. Rental cars usually come with street directories. Newsdealers and some bookstores sell this map, and the state auto club, the **RACQ,** in the General Post Office, 261 Queen St. (✆ **13 19 05** in Australia, or 07/3872-8465), is also a good source.

## THE NEIGHBORHOODS IN BRIEF

**City Center** The vibrant city center is where residents eat, shop, and socialize. Queen Street Mall, in the heart of town, is popular with shoppers and moviegoers, especially on weekends and Friday nights (when stores stay open until 9pm). The Eagle Street financial/legal office precinct houses some great restaurants with river views, and on Sundays there are markets by the Riverside Centre office tower and the Pier. Much of Brisbane's colonial architecture is in the city center, too. Strollers, bike riders, and in-line skaters shake the summer heat in the green haven of the Brisbane City Gardens at the business district's southern end.

**Fortitude Valley** Ten years ago, this suburb of derelict warehouses just east of the city center was one of the sleazier parts of town. Today, "the Valley" is a stamping ground for street-smart young folk who meet in restored pubs and eat in cool cafes. The lanterns, food stores, and shopping mall of Chinatown are here, too. Take Turbot Street to the Valley's Brunswick Street.

**New Farm** Always an appealing suburb, New Farm is now one of the city's in destinations for cafe-hopping, shopping, and cinema-going. Merthyr Street is where the action is, especially on Friday and Saturday nights. From the intersection of Wickham and Brunswick streets, follow Brunswick southeast for 13 blocks to Merthyr.

**Paddington** This hilltop suburb, a couple of kilometers northwest of the city, is one of the most attractive in Brisbane. Brightly painted Queenslander cottages line the main street, Latrobe Terrace, as it winds west along a ridge top. Many of the houses have been turned into shops and cafes, where you can browse, enjoy coffee and cake, or just admire the charming architecture.

**Milton & Rosalie** Milton's Park Road might not quite be a little bit of Europe, but it tries hard—even right down to a replica Eiffel Tower above the cafes and shops. Italian restaurants line the street, buzzing with office workers who down cappuccinos at alfresco restaurants, scout interior design stores for a new objet d'art to grace the living room, and stock up on European designer rags. A few minutes' drive away, Baroona Road and Nash Street (in Rosalie) are doing their best to catch up.

**West End** This small inner-city enclave is alive with ethnic restaurants,

cafes, and the odd interesting housewares or fashion store. Most action is at the intersection of Vulture and Boundary streets, where Asian grocers and delis abound.

**Bulimba** One of the emerging fashionable suburbs, Bulimba has a long connection with the river through the boat-building industry. One of the nicest ways to get there is by CityCat (see below). Oxford Street is the main drag, around which trendy cafes and shops are springing up.

## 2 Getting Around

### BY PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

**TransLink** operates a single network of buses, trains, and ferries. For timetables and route inquiries, call **TransInfo** (✆ **13 12 30** in Queensland, or 07/3215 5000; http://transinfo.com.au; Mon–Fri 6am–9pm, Sat–Sun 7am–9pm). An integrated ticket system operates, and the easiest places to buy your tickets are on the buses or at the train stations. You can also buy tickets and pick up maps and timetables at the Queen Street bus station information center (in the Myer Centre, off Queen Street Mall) and the Brisbane City Council customer service center at 69 Ann St. Tickets are also sold at some inner city newsdealers.

A trip in a single sector or zone on the bus, train, or ferry costs A$2 (US$1.60). A single ticket is good for up to 2 hours on a one-way journey on any combination of bus, train, or ferry. When traveling with a parent, kids under 5 travel free, and kids 5 to 15 and students pay half fare. If you plan on using public transport a lot, a 10 Trip ticket may be a good investment.

You will probably not need to travel farther than four zones on the transport system, which will get you as far as the Australian Woolshed at Ferny Grove. This will cost you the princely sum of A$3.20 (US$2.55) each way. A one-day ticket for four zones will cost A$6.40 (US$5.10).

On weekends and public holidays, it's cheaper to buy an **Off-Peak ticket,** which lets you travel all day. The Off-Peak ticket is also available on weekdays, but you must plan your sightseeing around the fact that it cannot be used before 9am or between 3:30 and 7pm.

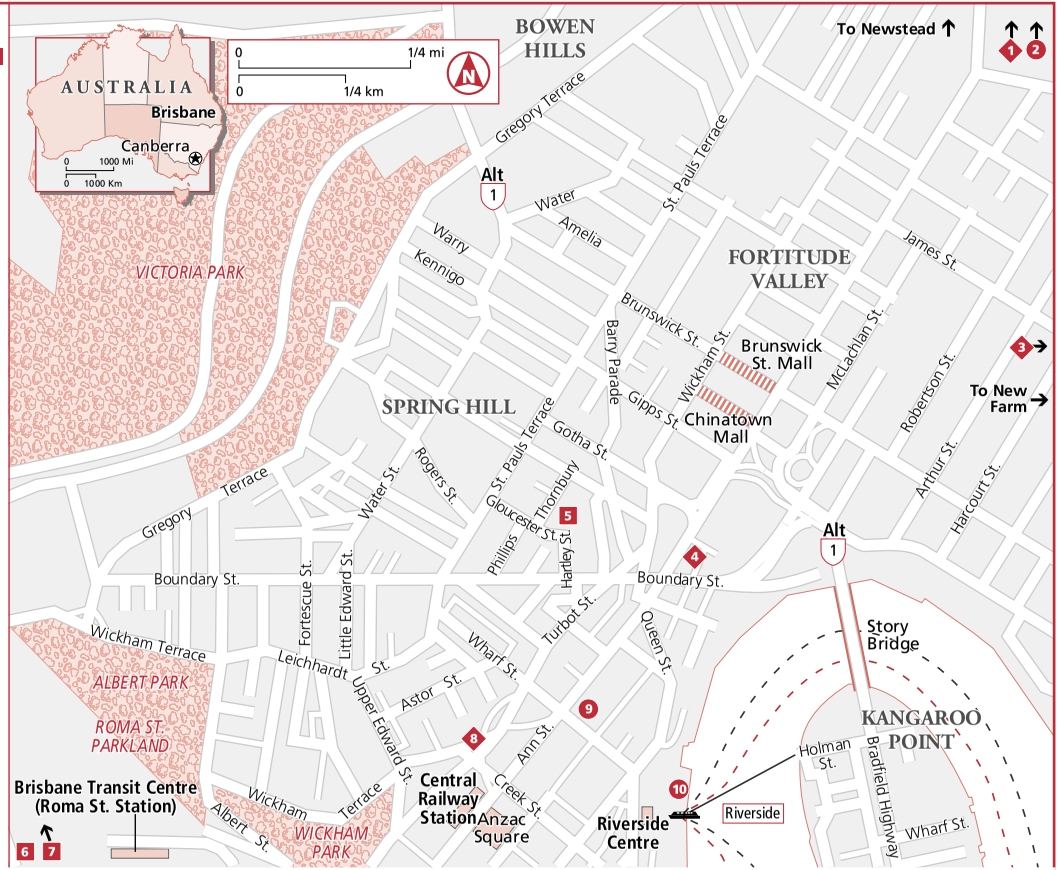
The **Brisbane Mobility Map,** produced by the Brisbane City Council, outlines wheelchair access to buildings in the city center and includes a detailed guide to the Queen Street Mall and a map of the Brisbane Botanic Gardens Mount Coot-tha. The council's disability services unit also has a range of publications, including one on the city's Braille trails and an access guide to parks. Guides and maps are available from council customer service centers (✆ **07/3403 8888**) and from the **Access Brisbane** website (http://brisbane-stories.powerup.com.au/access).

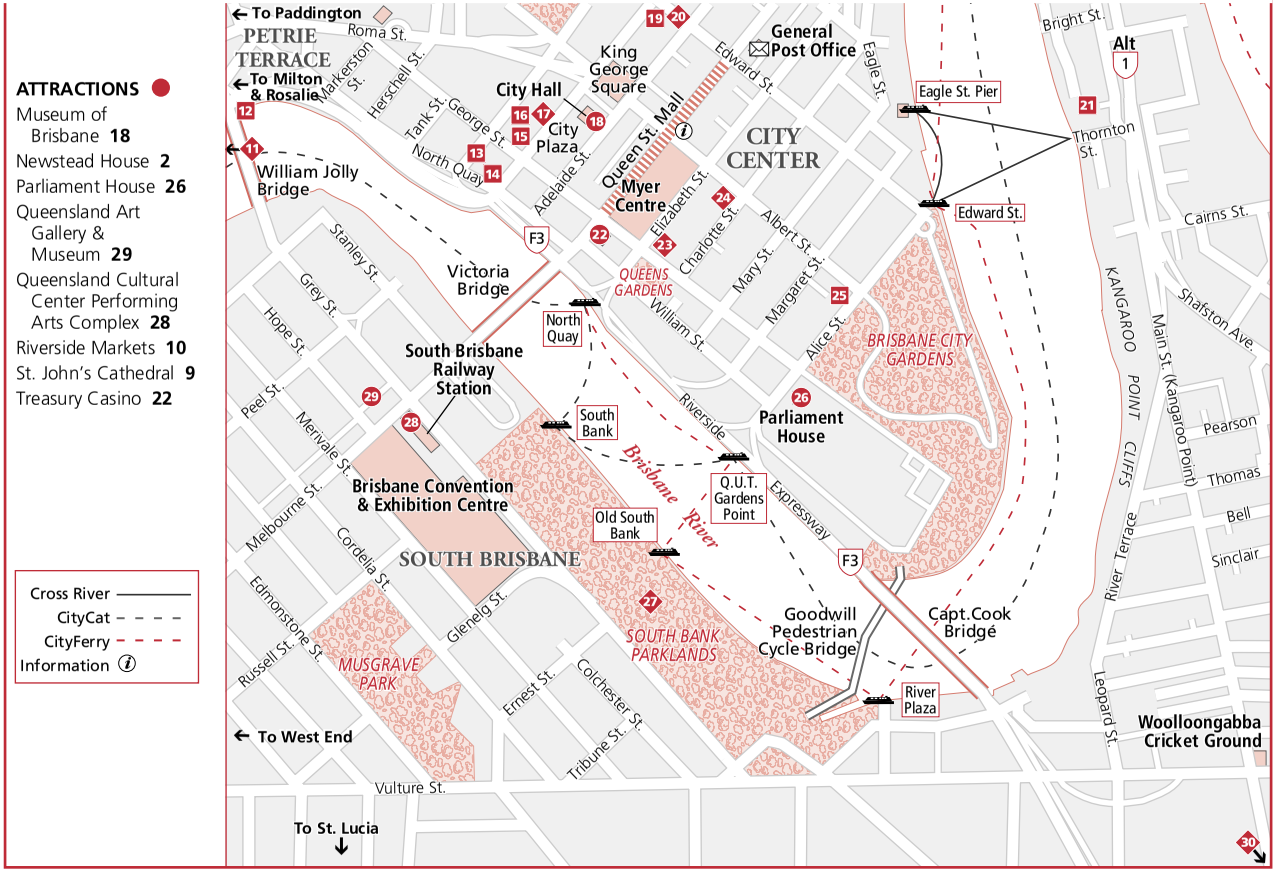
**BY BUS** Buses operate from around 5am to 11pm weekdays, with less service on weekends. On Sunday, many routes stop around 5pm. Most buses depart from City Hall at King George Square, from Adelaide or Ann street. The Downtown Loop is a free bus service that circles the city center. The Loop's distinctive red buses run on two routes, stopping at convenient places including Central Station, Queen Street Mall, City Botanic Gardens, Riverside Centre, and King George Square. Look for the red bus stops. It runs Monday through Friday every 10 minutes from 7am to 5:50pm.

**BY FERRY** Ferries run from around 6am to 10:30pm daily. The fast **CityCat** ferries run to many places of interest, including South Bank and the Queensland Cultural

**ACCOMMODATIONS**
- Catherine House **7**
- Explorers Inn **16**
- Hotel George Williams (YMCA) **15**
- Hotel Ibis Brisbane **13**
- Milton Motel Apartments **12**
- Palace Backpackers **19**
- Quay West Suites Brisbane **25**
- Thornbury House Bed & Breakfast **5**
- Waverley **6**

**DINING**
- Arrivederci Pizza Al Metro **11**
- Breakfast Creek Hotel **1**
- Cilantro **8**
- e'cco bistro **4**
- Explorers Café **17**
- Govinda's **23**
- Green Papaya **30**
- New Farm Deli & Café **3**
- Palace Café & Restaurant **20**
- Plough Inn **27**
- Pane e Vino **24**

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North Quay
William Jolly Bridge
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Grey St.
Hope St.
Peel St.
Merivale St.
Melbourne St.
Cordelia St.
Edmonstone St.
Russell St.
MUSGRAVE PARK
Glenelg St.
Ernest St.
Colchester St.
Tribune St.
Vulture St.
To St. Lucia
← To West End
Victoria Bridge
F3
South Brisbane Railway Station
Brisbane Convention & Exhibition Centre
SOUTH BRISBANE
City Hall
City Plaza
King George Square
Adelaide St.
Queen St. Mall
Myer Centre
Elizabeth St.
Charlotte St.
Albert St.
Mary St.
Margaret St.
Alice St.
William St.
QUEENS GARDENS
North Quay
South Bank
Old South Bank
Riverside
Brisbane River
Q.U.T. Gardens Point
Expressway
F3
Parliament House
BRISBANE CITY GARDENS
CITY CENTER
General Post Office
Edward St.
Eagle St.
Eagle St. Pier
Thornton St.
Bright St.
Alt
1
Cairns St.
Shafston Ave.
KANGAROO POINT CLIFFS
Main St. (Kangaroo Point)
Pearson
Thomas
Bell
Sinclair
River Terrace
Leopard St.
Woolloongabba Cricket Ground
Goodwill Pedestrian Cycle Bridge
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SOUTH BANK PARKLANDS
River Plaza
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Centre; the restaurants and Sunday markets at the Riverside Centre; and New Farm Park, not far from the cafes of Merthyr Street. They run every half-hour between Queensland University, approximately 9km (5½ miles) along the river to the south, and Brett's Wharf, about 9km (5½ miles) to the north. Slower but more frequent CityFerry service (Inner City and Cross-River ferries) stops at a few more points, including the south end of South Bank Parklands, Kangaroo Point, and Edward Street right outside the City Botanic Gardens. Two hours on the CityCat takes you the entire length of its run.

**BY TRAIN** Brisbane's suburban rail network is fast, quiet, safe, and clean. Trains run from around 5am to midnight, stopping at about 11pm on Sundays. All trains leave Central Station, between Turbot and Ann streets at Edward Street.

**BY TAXI** Call **Yellow Cabs** (✆ **13 19 24** in Australia) and **Black and White Taxis** (✆ **13 10 08** in Australia). There are major taxi ranks at each end of the Queen Street Mall, on Edward Street and George Street (outside the Treasury Casino).

**BY CAR** Brisbane's grid of one-way streets can be confusing, so plan your route before you set off. Brisbane's biggest parking lot is at the Myer Centre (enter from Elizabeth St.) and is open 24 hours (✆ **07/3229 1699**). Most hotels and motels have free parking for guests.

**Avis** (✆ **13 63 33** in Australia, or 07/3221 2900), **Budget** (✆ **1300/362 848** in Australia, or 07/3220 0699), **Europcar** (✆ **07/3006 7440**), and **Hertz** (✆ **13 30 39** in Australia, or 07/3221 6166) all have outlets in the city center. **Thrifty** (✆ **1300/367 227** in Australia, or 07/3006 3255) is on the edge of the city center at 49 Barry Parade, Fortitude Valley.

## *FAST FACTS:* Brisbane

***American Express*** The office at 131 Elizabeth St. (✆ **1300/139 060**) cashes traveler's checks, exchanges currency, and refunds lost traveler's checks.

***Business Hours*** Banks are open Monday through Thursday from 9:30am to 4pm and until 5pm on Fridays. See "The Shopping Scene," later in this chapter, for store hours. Some restaurants close Monday and/or Tuesday nights, and bars are generally open from 10am or 11am until midnight.

***Currency Exchange*** **Travelex,** Lennons Plaza, Queen Street Mall between Albert and George streets (✆ **07/3229 8610;** www.travelex.com.au), is open Monday through Friday from 9am to 6pm, Saturday from 9:30am to 5pm, and Sunday from 10:30am to 4:30pm. Locations at the airport are open whenever flights are arriving.

***Dentist*** The **Adelaide and Albert Dental Centre,** 245 Albert St. (at Adelaide St.), opposite City Hall (✆ **07/3229 4121**), is open Monday through Friday from 8am to 6pm.

***Doctor*** The **Travellers' Medical and Vaccination Centre** (✆ **07/3221 9066;** www.tmvc.com.au) is on Level 5 of the Qantas building, 247 Adelaide St., between Creek and Edward streets. It is open Monday and Friday from 8am to 5pm, Tuesday 9am to 7pm, Wednesday 8am to 9pm, Thursday 8am to 2pm, and Saturday 8:30am to 2pm. For after-hours emergencies, call ✆ **0408/199 166.**

***Embassies & Consulates*** The United States, Canada, and New Zealand have no representation in Brisbane; see "Fast Facts: Sydney" in chapter 4, "Sydney," for those countries' nearest offices. The British Consulate-General is at Level 26, Waterfront Place, 1 Eagle St. (✆ **07/3223 3200**).

***Emergencies*** Dial ✆ **000** for fire, ambulance, or police help in an emergency. This is a free call from a private or public telephone.

***Eyeglass Repair*** **OPSM** in the Wintergarden, 171–209 Queen Street Mall (✆ **07/3221 1158**), and in the Myer Centre, 91 Queen Street Mall (✆ **07/3229 2913**), is a reputable chain retailer and repairer of eyeglasses.

***Hospitals*** The nearest casualty ward (emergency room) is at **Royal Brisbane Hospital,** about a 15-minute drive from the city at Herston Road, Herston (✆ **07/3636 8111**).

***Hot Lines*** **Lifeline** (✆ **13 11 14**) is a 24-hour emotional-crisis counseling service. **Alcoholics Anonymous** can be reached at ✆ **07/3255 9162.**

***Internet Access*** The **South Bank Information Centre,** Stanley Street Plaza, South Bank Parklands, open from 9am to 5:30pm Saturday to Thursday and until 7:30pm Friday, charges A$2 (US$1.60) per 15 minutes. In Paddington, the **Computer Café,** 107 Latrobe Terrace (✆ **07/3369 9077**), above Woolworths, is open Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday from 10am to 9pm, and Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday from 10am to 6pm.

***Lost Property*** For lost property on **trains,** call ✆ **07/3235 1859,** 10:15am to 2:15pm Monday through Friday; on ferries and buses, call the **Brisbane City Council** (✆ **07/3403 8888**). Call police headquarters (✆ **07/3364 6464**) for the telephone number of the police station closest to where the item was lost.

***Luggage Storage & Lockers*** The **Brisbane Transit Centre** on Roma Street (✆ **1800/632 640**) has baggage lockers.

***Newspapers & Magazines*** *The Courier-Mail* (Mon–Sat) and the *Sunday Mail* are Brisbane's daily newspapers. The free color weekly *Brisbane News* provides a good guide to dining, entertainment, and shopping.

***Police*** Dial ✆ **000** in an emergency, or ✆ **07/3364 6464** for police headquarters. Police are stationed 24 hours a day in the Pavilion Arcade, 130 Queen St. (in the Queen Street Mall), near Albert Street (✆ **07/3224 4444**).

***Safety*** Brisbane is relatively crime free, but as in any large city, personal safety should be considered especially when out at night. Stick to well-lit streets and busy precincts.

***Time Zone*** Brisbane is GMT plus 10 hours. It does not observe daylight saving time, which means it's on the same time as Sydney and Melbourne in winter, and 1 hour behind those cities from October to March, when they go to daylight saving. For the exact local time, call ✆ **1194.**

***Weather*** Call ✆ **1196** for the southeast Queensland weather forecast.

## 3 Accommodations You Can Afford

Accommodations in Brisbane are generally cheaper than Sydney. Brisbane has many clean motels, nifty little budget places, and B&Bs in stylish homes close to the city or right in the heart of town. Spring Hill is just a few blocks (uphill) from the city center. For Kangaroo Point you need to drive or take a bus over the Story Bridge, or take one of the ferries (trip time: 3 min.) that depart every 10 minutes from 5:30am to midnight.

**Catherine House** ★ Vicki and David Mol's large, pretty two-story 1881 home, decorated with a blend of turn-of-the-20th-century and contemporary furnishings, and art collected from around the world, is warm, inviting, and friendly. The lounge is cozy, with an open fireplace for winter, but on warm Queensland evenings most guests retreat to the rear deck overlooking the pool and palm-filled gardens. There are two rooms with queen-size beds and two self-contained apartments with kitchenettes. All bedrooms have ceiling fans, and broadband Internet access is also available. No smoking indoors.

151 Kelvin Grove Rd., Kelvin Grove, Brisbane, QLD 4059. ✆ **07/3839 6988.** Fax 07/3236 9093. www.babs.com.au/catherine/index.htm. 2 double units, 2 self-contained apartments, all with private bathrooms. A$95–A$120 (US$76–US$96) single; A$120–A$150 (US$96–US$120) double; self-contained apts A$595 (US$476) per week. Extra persons A$25 (US$20). Rates include gourmet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. Free pickup from Roma St. Transit Centre on request. **Amenities:** Large outdoor pool; nearby golf course and tennis courts; Jacuzzi; babysitting; coin-op laundry; laundry service. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, VCR, kitchenette (in some), fridge, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer.

**Explorers Inn Hotel** ★ *Value* You'll be astonished to find such spruce decor and terrific value in one place—and in the heart of the city! Each tiny room at this former YWCA was designed by its architect owners to contain just the necessities—including a narrow desk. The front desk lends hair dryers, and the friendly staff will help with booking tours. All rooms are nonsmoking, but there is a smokers' lounge. There's also an Internet kiosk. If you book on the Internet, you can get breakfast for an extra A$5 (US$4) per day. Downstairs is the good-value Explorers Cafe restaurant and bar. South Bank, the casino, the Roma Street Transit Centre, and Queen Street Mall are all close by.

63 Turbot St. (near George St.), Brisbane, QLD 4000. ✆ **1800/623 288** in Australia, or 07/3211 3488. Fax 07/3211 3499. www.explorers.com.au. 58 units (all with shower only). A$79–A$109 (US$63–US$87) double; A$104 (US$83) family unit for up to 4. AE, DC, MC, V. Train: Roma St. Bus: Downtown Loop. **Amenities:** Restaurant (see Explorers Cafe in "Great Deals on Dining," below); tour desk; car-rental desk; secretarial services; coin-op laundry; laundry service; dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, coffeemaker.

**Hotel George Williams** ★ *Value* This 7-year-old hotel is so smart it's hard to believe it's a YMCA. Accommodations have vivid bedcovers, chrome chairs, and artsy bedside lamps on chrome stands. Rooms are small but some can sleep up to four adults. Among the useful facilities are a 24-hour front desk, safe-deposit boxes, and a hip cybercafe. Hair dryers are available on request. Guests have free access to the City Y health club, the largest hotel gym in Australia, which offers aerobics classes, personal trainers, and massage (for an extra fee). Four rooms are designed for guests with disabilities, and there is also easy access to the gym.

317–325 George St. (between Turbot and Ann sts.), Brisbane, QLD 4000. ✆ **1800/064 858** in Australia, or 07/3308 0700. Fax 07/3308 0733. www.hgw.com.au. 81 units (most with shower only). A$93–A$135 (US$74–US$108) double. Extra person A$22 (US$18). Children under 4 stay free in parent's room. Ask about packages. AE, DC, MC, V. Limited free parking. Train: Roma St. Bus: Downtown Loop. Ferry: North Quay (CityCat or CityFerry). **Amenities:** Cafe; bar; health club; tour desk; coin-op laundry w/iron and ironing board; laundry service; same-day dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, coffeemaker.

**Hotel Ibis Brisbane** You get what you pay for at this three-star sister property to the Mercure, around the corner (see below). In this case, it is basically a room, with few amenities you might expect in a large hotel. But if you don't mind doing without river views, porters, a pool, or other small luxuries, this could be the place for you. Rebuilt inside an office building in 1998, the hotel has rooms furnished in contemporary style, with sizable work desks and small but smart bathrooms.

27–35 Turbot St. (between North Quay and George St.), Brisbane, QLD 4000. ✆ **800/221-4542** in the U.S. and Canada, 1300/65 6565 in Australia, 020/8283 4500 in the U.K., 0800/44 4422 in New Zealand, or 07/3237 2333. Fax 07/3237 2444. www.accorhotels.com.au. 218 units. A$119–A$145 (US$95–US$116) double. Extra person A$30 (US$24). Children under 16 stay free in parent's room with existing bedding. Ask about packages. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking A$10 (US$8) at Mercure Hotel Brisbane (see below). Train: Roma St. Bus: Downtown Loop. Ferry: North Quay (CityCat or CityFerry). **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; 2 bars; car-rental desk; airport shuttle; coin-op laundry; laundry service; same-day dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

**Mercure Hotel Brisbane** ★ Sweeping views of the Brisbane River enliven many rooms at this 14-story hotel (rated four stars by AAA) across the water from South Bank. A refurbishment of all rooms in late 2002 gave them a fresh, contemporary look in red and cream. The four suites have river views, and the standard rooms are comfortable and unassuming. Rooms without water vistas have nice city views. Roma Street Transit Centre, Treasury Casino, Queen Street Mall, South Bank Parklands, and the Queensland Cultural Centre are all a short walk away.

85–87 North Quay (between Ann and Turbot sts.), Brisbane, QLD 4000. ✆ **800/221-4542** in the U.S. and Canada, 1300/65 6565 in Australia, 020/8283 4500 in the U.K., 0800/44 4422 in New Zealand, or 07/3236 3300. Fax 07/3236 1035. www.mercurebrisbane.com.au. 194 units. A$169–A$406 (US$135–US$325) double or studio suite; A$269–A$457 (US$215–US$366) executive suite. Extra person A$36 (US$29). Children under 16 stay free in parent's room with existing bedding. Ask about packages. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking A$10 (US$8). Train: Roma St. Bus: Downtown Loop. Ferry: North Quay (CityCat or CityFerry). **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor pool; access to nearby health club (A$10/US$8); sauna; concierge; car-rental desk; airport shuttle; 24-hr. room service; babysitting; coin-op laundry; laundry service; same-day dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, dataport, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

**Milton Motel Apartments** A short train ride from downtown, close to the restaurant strip of Park Road, this two-story Tuscan-style complex has accommodations options including studio, one-bedroom, and two-bedroom apartments in three buildings. It's just a stroll to the river and a half-hour walk on the bike path to the city center. The apartments are modern, light, and compact but well designed. All units have a balcony and are serviced three times a week. No smoking indoors.

19 Sheehan St., Milton, Brisbane, QLD 4064. ✆ **07/3876 2360.** Fax 07/3876 2359. www.milton-motel.com.au. 36 units. A$85–A$96 (US$68–US$77) studio double; A$96 (US$77) double one-bedroom apt; A$120–A$158 (US$96–US$126) 2-bedroom apt (sleeps 6); A$175 (US$140) penthouse apt for 4 (sleeps 6; A$10/US$8 per extra person). Weekly and monthly rates available. AE, MC, V. Free parking. Train: Milton. **Amenities**: Outdoor pool. *In room:* A/C, TV, kitchen, laundry.

**Ryan's on the River** ★★ River and city views from every room, friendly staff, and large, airy rooms make this one of Brisbane's best moderately priced hotels. The city ferry stop is a 2-minute walk across a strip of parkland, where a riverside walk/bike path leads to a playground, the Kangaroo Point cliffs, and all the way to South Bank. Out under a pergola by the saltwater pool and lounge chairs beside the river, you can cook up a barbecue dinner provided by the hotel. Breakfast is served out here, too. The rooms all have balconies. Rooms on the south side have partial river views, those on the north are quieter and have great city and Story Bridge views (the bridge lights up at night), and rooms on the west side get a superb river-and-city vista that's the

envy of every five-star hotel in Brisbane. You can also have day use of a room for A$99 (US$79) from 10am to 6pm.

269 Main St. (at Scott St.), Kangaroo Point, Brisbane, QLD 4169. ✆ **07/3391 1011.** Fax 07/3391 1824. www.ryans.com.au. 23 units (all with shower only). A$89–A$159 (US$71–US$127) double; A$350 (US$280) suite. Extra adult A$20 (US$16); extra child A$12 (US$9.60). Crib A$10 (US$8). Ask about packages. AE, DC, MC, V. Free secured parking. Ferry: Thornton St. from Edward St. or Eagle St. Pier (Cross River Ferry). **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor saltwater pool; tour desk; babysitting; coin-op laundry. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer, iron.

**Thornbury House Bed & Breakfast** ★ *Finds* A 15-minute walk to Spring Hill from the city center brings you to this 1886 Queenslander cottage on a quiet street. Hosts Christine and Gerry Scanlan have decked out every room individually with Oriental rugs, comfortable beds, bathrobes, and lovely old furniture and knickknacks. Those without attached bathrooms have their own private bathrooms down the hall. The attic suite sleeps three and has two bedrooms, a sitting room, and a bathroom. Two of the rooms have direct access to the front veranda. Breakfast is served in the ferny courtyard (a cool and restful place on a humid day), where you can help yourself to tea, coffee, cookies, and the newspaper any time of day. Guests have access to the house's washer, dryer, iron, fridge, and microwave. The airport bus stops at the front door.

1 Thornbury St., Spring Hill, Brisbane, QLD 4000. ✆ **07/3839 5334.** www.babs.com.au/thornbury. 6 units (5 with shower only). A$100–A$110 (US$80–US$88) double; A$140 (US$112) apt. Rates include breakfast. AE, MC, V. Limited free parking; metered street parking A$5 (US$4) per day. Train: Central. **Amenities:** Access to nearby pools, golf club, and health club; play area and toys; nonsmoking rooms; dry cleaning; fax, computer, and dataport available; pay phone. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer.

**Waverley** ★★ *Finds* On the main shopping and restaurant strip in Paddington, this three-story 1888 residence retains most of its original features, such as bay windows, tongue-and-groove walls, soaring ceilings, and polished timber floors. The two air-conditioned front rooms are spacious and individually furnished with supportive mattresses, comfy sofas, and attractive bathrooms. Two apartments (with kitchens and fans) are downstairs. Your hostess, Annette Henry, also known as "the muffin queen," cooks a hearty breakfast in the yellow kitchen. A rear deck on both levels overlooks two old mango trees, busy with possums at night and visited regularly by day by a pair of native butcherbirds. There's also a lounge. No smoking indoors.

5 Latrobe Terrace (at Cochrane St.), Paddington, Brisbane, QLD 4064. ✆ **07/3369 8973,** or 0419/741 282 mobile. Fax 07/3876 6655. www.babs.com.au/waverley. 4 units (all with shower only). A$120 (US$96) B&B double; A$490 (US$392) apt per week. B&B rates include full breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking for 4 cars. Bus: 375 or 377; stop 20m (65 ft.) away. Pickup from Roma St. Transit Centre available on request. **Amenities:** Coin-op laundry; nonsmoking rooms; safe. *In room:* A/C, TV, kitchenette (apts only), fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

## SUPER-CHEAP SLEEPS

**Palace Backpackers** Once a temperance hall, this lovely Heritage-listed five-story building with wrought-iron lace verandas now plays host to less than temperate backpackers. Don't avoid it on that account; the place is well run, and a beautiful restoration has provided simple, pleasant private rooms with iron beds, proper mattresses and crisp linen, lockers, and either air-conditioning or fans. Only someone literally carrying a backpack is entitled to a dorm bed. The spick-and-span renovated bathrooms are cleaned twice a day. There are rooms and bathrooms for travelers with disabilities. There's a rooftop sun deck with a barbecue, TV lounges with Internet access, a communal kitchen, and an excellent cafe (see "Great Deals on Dining," below). No smoking in rooms.

Corner of Ann and Edward sts., Brisbane, QLD 4000. ✆ **1800/676 340** in Australia, or 07/3211 2433. Fax 07/3211 2466. www.palacebackpackers.com.au. 120 units (350 beds), none with bathroom. A$36 (US$29) single; A$28 (US$22) twin; A$25 (US$20) triple or quad share; A$56 (US$45) double; A$22–A$24 (US$18–US$19) dorm bed. 4-, 5- and 6-night and weekly rates available. MC, V. Train: Central. Bus: City Circle 333. Courtesy shuttle to and from Roma St. Transit Center 7:45am–7pm. **Amenities:** Cafe; bar; tour desk; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C.

### WORTH A SPLURGE

**Quay West Suites** ★★ When the business folk go home on Fridays, they leave available this glamorous all-suite hotel, just 4 blocks from Queen Street Mall; you'll find excellent package deals here. A one-bedroom suite will sleep four with the sofa bed. The suites have all the amenities of a five-star hotel—daily servicing, concierge, a bar and restaurant with a lovely outdoor terrace—and their own laundry, dining area, separate bedroom, and fully equipped kitchen. Pamper yourself in the plunge pool or Jacuzzi; then back in your room get into your bathrobe, gaze over the Botanic Gardens, read the free newspaper, turn up your CD player, or watch one of the two TVs.

132 Alice St. (between Albert and George sts.), Brisbane, QLD 4000. ✆ **1800/672 726** in Australia, or 07/3853 6000. Fax 07/3853 6060. www.mirvac.com.au. 75 apts. A$255 (US$204) 1-bedroom apt; A$350 (US$280) 2-bedroom apt. Extra person A$35 (US$28). Ask about special packages. AE, DC, MC, V. Undercover secure valet parking A$10 (US$8). Bus: Downtown Loop. Ferry: Edward St. (Inner City and Cross River Ferry); or Riverside (CityCat), then a 10-min. stroll. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor pool; Jacuzzi; concierge; business center; 24-hr. room service; valet dry cleaning or laundry service. *In room:* A/C, TV w/in-house movies, dataport, kitchen, minibar, hair dryer, iron, safe, laundry.

## 4 Great Deals on Dining

There are plenty of places to eat well at a reasonable price in Brisbane. For cheap meals, head to the stylish Merthyr Street bistro strip in New Farm, the cafes of Given Terrace and Latrobe Terrace in Paddington, the Asian restaurants around the intersection of Vulture and Boundary streets in West End, and the cheap and cheerful cafes huddling shoulder to shoulder in Brunswick Street Mall in Fortitude Valley. Fortitude Valley is also where you'll find Brisbane's Chinatown. There are also moderately priced restaurants on Park Road in Milton, though few of these are BYO. In the city center you'll find cheap, lively sidewalk cafes along Albert Street.

A cluster of affordable good restaurants has mushroomed in the unlikely location of Baroona Road and Nash Street in Rosalie, a sleepy suburb next to Paddington.

### IN THE CITY CENTER

**Explorers Cafe** Value CAFE FARE Great value—nothing costs more than A$12 (US$9.60)—is the hallmark of this basement restaurant. One of the best-value a la carte menus in town offers standard fares such as soups, pastas, seafood, steaks, and chicken dishes, with a choose-and-pay-at-the-counter format and table service. There are a couple of vegetarian options on the menu, which is the same for lunch and dinner.

Under the Explorers Inn, 63 Turbot St. (near corner of George St.). ✆ **07/3211 3488.** Fax 07/3211 3499. www.explorers.com.au. Reservations recommended at lunch. Main courses A$8–A$12 (US$6.40–US$9.60); breakfast A$4–A$11 (US$3.20–US$8.80). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 7–9:30am and 6–8pm; Mon–Fri noon–2pm. Train: Roma St. Bus: Downtown Loop.

**Palace Café and Restaurant** Value CAFE FARE It's designed for the backpackers upstairs (see "Accommodations You Can Afford," above), but you don't have to sleep here to dine at this airy, colorful cafe or in the bistro-style restaurant. The cafe serves breakfast from 7:30am to 2:30pm, and the restaurant offers a simple but hearty mix of burgers, steaks, fish and chips, and so on, with some vegetarian options. A TV, magazines, and two computers with Internet access give a homey feel.

In the Palace Backpackers, corner of Ann and Edward sts. ✆ **07/3032 5740.** Breakfast A$4–A$7.90 (US$3.20–US$6.30); main courses A$3.90–A$11 (US$3.10–US$8.80). No credit cards. Daily 7:30am–2:30pm and 6–9pm. Train: Central. Bus: Downtown Loop.

**Pane e Vino** MODERN ITALIAN/CAFE FARE A laid-back attitude attracts a mixed lunch set to this contemporary open-sided cafe on a busy street corner. Sit inside in the mod decor of polished concrete floors and sleek timber, or choose a sidewalk table. The simple but sophisticated all-day menu boasts things like swordfish served with a zucchini and potato *rosti,* with wilted spinach, sweet-potato chips, and an olive and caper salsa. There's also a wide variety of lighter risottos and pastas, huge focaccia, and tasty panini.

Albert St. at Charlotte St. ✆ **07/3220 0044.** Reservations recommended at lunch. Main courses A$15–A$28 (US$12–US$22); focaccia and panini A$9.90–A$13 (US$7.90–US$10). AE, DC, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 7:30am–10pm; Fri–Sat 7:30am–11:30pm. Bus: Downtown Loop.

## SUPER-CHEAP EATS

**Govinda's** *Value* VEGETARIAN If you're a seasoned vegetarian traveler in Oz, you know to seek out the Hare Krishnas' chain of Govinda restaurants. This one serves vegetable casserole, dahl soup, samosas, and other tasty stuff with a north Indian influence. The atmosphere is spartan, but who cares when the food is so satisfying? This is a stimulant-free zone, so don't come expecting alcohol, tea, or coffee.

99 Elizabeth St. (opposite Myer Centre), 2nd floor. ✆ **07/3210 0255.** All-you-can-eat A$8.50 (US$6.80) adults, A$7.50 (US$6) students and seniors. No credit cards. Mon–Thurs 11am–6:30pm; Fri 11am–8:30pm; Saturday 11am–2:30pm. Sunday Feast from 5pm, with lectures and dancing, costs A$5 (US$4). Bus: Downtown Loop.

## IN NEW FARM

**New Farm Deli & Café** CAFE FARE Well-heeled locals and the corporate crowd pack this cheery deli located at the rear of a shopping complex. Try to get a seat outside. Loads of inventive pastas, filling focaccia sandwiches, and gourmet burgers stack the menu, and there are lots of great salads. Blackboard specials feature such delights as creamy mushroom truffle and spinach risotto or Italian pork sausage with lemon and nutmeg on fettuccine. Breakfast is served all day on weekends. Service is fast and pleasant. It's BYO, and there's no corkage fee.

900 Brunswick St. (at Merthyr Rd.). ✆ **07/3358 2634.** Breakfast A$9–A$16 (US$7.20–US$13); main courses A$6.50–A$18 (US$5.20–US$14). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 7am–4pm. Closed public holidays. Bus: 167, 168, or 178.

## IN MILTON

**Arrivederci Pizza Al Metro** PIZZA Cheapest of the bunch along the Park Road restaurant strip is this pizzeria with airy indoor seating and some alfresco tables. They offer a range of mostly basic but tasty toppings like salami, peppers, cheese, and mushrooms, as well as the usual pastas, lasagna, and salads. It's a humble joint with cheery red-and-white checked tablecloths, but it's a nice night out if you bring a bottle of red, dine outside, and then stroll up the street to people-watch and window-shop. BYO (A$2.50/US$2 per person corkage fee) and licensed.

1 Park Rd. ✆ **07/3369 8500.** Reservations recommended Fri–Sat dinner. Main courses A$5.50–A$17 (US$4.40–US$14) lunch, A$12–A$17 (US$9.60–US$14) dinner; pizzas for 2 A$15–A$17 (US$12–US$14), pizzas for 4 A$24–A$29 (US$19–US$23). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11am–10pm (midnight on Fri and Sat nights). Train: Milton. Bus: 410.

## IN MT. COOT-THA

**The Summit** ★★ MODERN AUSTRALIAN It would be hard to find a better view of Brisbane than from here. A teahouse of some kind has been on this mountaintop for

more than a century. Part 19th-century Queenslander house and part modern extension, the restaurant has wraparound covered decks with a view of the city and Moreton Bay. A changing menu features local produce and dishes with Asian and Mediterranean influences, teamed with Australian wines. Try saltwater barramundi (fish) filet, or roasted kangaroo loin. The early-bird offer—half-price main courses if you finish by 7pm—is available starting at 5:30pm. When you've finished dining, spend some time on the deck—at night the city lights provide a glittering panorama.

At the Mt. Coot-tha Lookout, Sir Samuel Griffith Dr. ✆ **07/3369 9922.** Fax 07/3369 8937. www.brisbanelookout.com. Reservations recommended Fri–Sat night. Main courses A$27–A$34 (US$22–US$27). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11:30am–midnight; Sun brunch 8–10:30am. Closed for lunch Jan 1, Good Friday, Dec 26; closed for dinner Dec 25. Bus: 471. From Roma St. Transit Centre, take Upper Roma St. and Milton Rd. 3.5km (2¼ miles) west to the Western Fwy. roundabout at Toowong Cemetery, veer right into Sir Samuel Griffith Dr., and go approx. 3km (2 miles). Free parking.

## IN EAST BRISBANE

**Green Papaya** *Value* NORTH VIETNAMESE Clean, fresh, and simple are the key words to describe owner-chef Lien Yeoman's approach to her native cuisine. Two

### *Kids* Family-Friendly Restaurants

The special kids' menu at **Cilantro,** in Novotel Brisbane Hotel, 200 Creek St., in the city center (✆ **07/3309 3364**), is designed by a nutritionist to be healthy but appealing and is good enough for adults to eat, too. You won't find fish fingers or frozen fries on the menu here; tender lamb cutlets with green beans and carrot sticks are more likely—and kids love every bite! Desserts include fresh fruit with ice cream, frozen yogurt, or apple crumble with vanilla custard. Kids also get a free placemat, cup, and puzzle when dining from the kids' menu in the restaurant. Main courses are A$7.50 to A$9.95 (US$6–US$7.95), desserts A$3.50 to A$4.50 (US$2.80–US$3.60). Open daily for breakfast and dinner. All major credit cards are accepted.

A Brisbane institution, **Morgan's Seafood Restaurant,** Bird o' Passage Parade, Scarborough (✆ **07/3203 5744;** fax 07/3880 1844), offers great views across to Moreton Island and is paradise for parents and kids. The restaurant has its own fleet of trawlers that dock nearby to disgorge mussels, mud crabs, prawns, oysters, and the freshest reef fish. Classic seafood platters and Asian-style dishes are available, and kids can choose anything they like for a "pint-size" special price of A$9.90 (US$7.90). Even the *teppanyaki* grill has a kids' menu, which includes *yakitori,* fish *furai,* and chicken *kara age* (A$9.60–A$11/US$7.70–US$8.80). All children's meals include steamed rice, and ice cream for dessert. Open daily for lunch and dinner. All major credit cards are accepted.

The children's menu at **Summit Restaurant,** Sir Samuel Griffith Drive, Mt. Coot-tha (✆ **07/3369 9922;** fax 07/3369 8937), features several choices including chicken fingers with honey dipping sauce (A$8.70/US$6.95), sirloin steak burger with fried onions (A$9.80/US$7.85), and an old-fashioned banana split (A$4.70/US$3.75). Open Monday to Saturday from 11:30am to midnight, Sunday from 8am to midnight. All major credit cards are accepted.

cheerful rooms—painted yellow and blue—are usually crowded with a faithful clientele. If you don't know your *bo xao cay ngot* (spicy beef) from your *nom du du* (green papaya salad), the staff willingly gives advice. On Fridays (reservations essential) Lien creates her special Hanoi-style bouillabaisse. The restaurant is licensed, but you can bring your own bottled wine (no beer or spirits) for a corkage charge of A$3 (US$2.40) per person. Cooking classes run from time to time; call for a schedule. The restaurant also does takeout.

898 Stanley St. E. (at Potts St.), 1 block from Woolloongabba Cricket Ground. ✆ **07/3217 3599.** www.greenpapaya.com.au. Reservations recommended. Main courses A$10–A$36 (US$8–US$29); banquet menus (for minimum of 4 people) A$40–A$60 (US$32–US$48). AE, DC, MC, V. Tues–Sat 6–10pm; Fri lunch by reservation only. Closed Good Friday, Dec 25 to early Jan. Train: Woolloongabba. Parking at rear of restaurant and on the street.

## IN ALBION

**Breakfast Creek Hotel** ★ STEAK A A$4.5-million (US$3.6-million) renovation and restoration in 2002 gave fresh life to this Brisbane treasure. Built in 1889 and listed by the National Trust, the French Renaissance–style pub is fondly known as the Brekky Creek—or simply "the Creek." The quintessentially Queensland establishment is famed for its gigantic steaks (choose your own) and beer "off the wood" (from the keg). Also on the premises, the Spanish Garden restaurant and the beer garden are always popular, and an outdoor dining area overlooks Breakfast Creek. The Substation No. 41 bar, created in the shell of a derelict electricity substation next to the hotel, makes the most of its exposed brick walls and soaring ceilings. The 4.5m-long (15-ft.) wooden bar is just the place to sip the latest cocktail.

2 Kingsford Smith Dr. (at Breakfast Creek Rd.). ✆ **07/3262 5988.** www.breakfastcreekhotel.com. Main courses A$17–A$25 (US$14–US$20). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily noon–2:30pm; Mon–Fri 5:30–9:30pm; Sat 5–9:30pm; Sun 5–8:30pm. Pub Sun–Thurs 10am–10pm; Fri–Sat 10am–11pm. Substation No. 41 Sun–Thurs 10am–11pm; Fri–Sat 10am–2am. Bus: 300 or 322. Wickham St. becomes Breakfast Creek Rd; the hotel is just off the route to the airport.

## WORTH A SPLURGE

**e'cco bistro** ★★★ MODERN AUSTRALIAN "Here it is" is one translation of the Italian *e'cco,* and that's the philosophy behind the food at this award-winning bistro. It serves simple food, done exceptionally well and with passion. In a former tea warehouse on the city fringe, it's one of Australia's best. Dishes include such delights as *chermoula* spiced lamb with eggplant and tomato chutney and minted sour cream, or salmon poached in tomato, chile, and lemon-grass broth with crab ravioli and mussels. The bistro is enormously popular, and reservations are essential. Large windows, bold colors, and modern furniture make it a pleasant setting in a small but popular restaurant enclave. The price structure is simple (each course's offerings are all the same price), and there's an extensive wine list—many by the glass. You can bring your own wine; the corkage fee is A$5.50 (US$4.40) per bottle.

100 Boundary St. (at Adelaide St.). ✆ **07/3831 8344.** Fax 07/3831 8460. www.eccobistro.com. Reservations required. Starters A$20 (US$16); main courses A$33 (US$26); desserts A$14 (US$11). AE, DC, MC, V. Tues–Fri noon–2:30pm; Tues–Sat 6–10pm. Mid-Nov to Dec 25 also Mon noon–2:30pm and 6–10pm. Closed 10 days Dec 25 to early Jan. Metered street parking.

# 5 Exploring Brisbane

## PLACES TO CUDDLE A KOALA & OTHER TOP ATTRACTIONS

**Lone Pine Koala Sanctuary** ★★ *Kids* This is the best spot in Australia to cuddle a koala—and one of the few places where koala cuddling is still allowed. Banned in

New South Wales and Victoria, koala cuddling is allowed in Queensland under strict conditions that ensure each animal is handled for less than 30 minutes a day—and gets every third day off! When it opened in 1927, Lone Pine had only two koalas, Jack and Jill; it is now home to more than 130. You can cuddle them anytime and have a photo taken holding one for A$15 (US$12); once you've purchased a photograph, your companions can take as many photos of you as they like with their own cameras. Lone Pine isn't just koalas—you can also hand-feed kangaroos and wallabies and get up close with emus, parrots, wombats, Tasmanian devils, skinks, lace monitors, frogs, bats, turtles, possums, and other native wildlife. There is a currency exchange, a gift shop, and a restaurant and cafe. You can also take advantage of the picnic and barbecue facilities. The nicest way to get to Lone Pine is a cruise down the Brisbane River aboard MV *Mirimar* (✆ **07/3221 0300**), which leaves North Quay at the Queen Street Mall, next to Victoria Bridge, at 10am. The 19km (12-mile) trip to Lone Pine takes 90 minutes and includes commentary. You have 2 hours to explore Lone Pine before returning, arriving in the city at 2:45pm. The fare, which includes a map and hotel pickup, is A$44 (US$35) for adults and A$25 (US$20) for children 3 to 13. Cruises run daily except April 25 (Anzac Day) and December 25.

Jesmond Rd., Fig Tree Pocket. ✆ **07/3378 1366.** Fax 07/3878 1770. www.koala.net. Admission A$18 (US$14) adults; A$13 (US$10) children 3–13; A$45 (US$36) families of 5. Daily 8:30am–5pm; Apr 25 (Anzac Day) 1:30–5pm. Bus: 430 from platform B3 at Myer Centre, Queen Street Mall; hourly 8:45am–3:45pm weekdays, 8:30am–4:30pm weekends and public holidays. Bus fare A$2.80 (US$2.25) adults, A$1.40 (US$1.10) children. Taxi from the city center about A$24 (US$19). By car (20 min. from the city center), take Milton Rd. to the roundabout at Toowong Cemetery, then Western Fwy. toward Ipswich. Signs point to Fig Tree Pocket and Lone Pine. Ample free parking.

**Queensland Cultural Centre** *Kids* This modern complex stretching along the south bank of the Brisbane River houses many of the city's performing arts venues as well as the state art gallery, museum, and library. With plenty of open plazas and fountains, it is a pleasing place to wander or just sit and watch the river and the city skyline. It's a 7-minute walk from town.

The **Queensland Performing Arts Centre** (✆ **07/3840 7444** administration Mon–Fri 9am–5pm, or 13 62 46 for all bookings; www.qpac.com.au) houses the 2,000-seat Lyric Theatre for musicals, ballet, and opera; the 1,800-seat Concert Hall for orchestral performances; the 850-seat Playhouse for plays; and the 315-seat Cremorne Theatre for theater in the round, cabaret, and experimental works. The complex has a restaurant and a cafe. Guided tours of the theaters and public and backstage areas leave from the box office at 11:30am on Friday and take about 90 minutes. Reservations are advisable during school holidays (✆ **07/3840 7444**). The cost is A$7.50 (US$6) adults and A$5 (US$4) children.

The **Queensland Art Gallery** ★ (✆ **07/3840 7303;** www.qag.qld.gov.au) is one of Australia's most attractive galleries, with vast light-filled spaces and interesting water features inside and out. It is a major player in the Australian art world, attracting international exhibitions of works by the likes of Renoir, Picasso, and van Gogh, and showcasing diverse modern Australian painters, sculptors, and other artists. It also has an impressive collection of Aboriginal art. Admission is free. Free guided tours run Monday through Friday at 11am, 1, and 2pm; Saturday and Sunday at 11:30am, 1, and 2:30pm. There is a gift shop and bistro. The gallery is open Monday through Friday 10am to 5pm, weekends 9am to 5pm; closed Good Friday, December 25, and until noon on April 25 (Anzac Day). In late 2006, a second gallery, the **Queensland**

## Cheap Thrills: What to See & Do for Free (or Almost) in Brisbane

- **Free shows at South Bank Parklands.** On weekends and holidays, there is almost always free entertainment at South Bank Parklands, such as street theater, live bands, movies under the stars, or concerts. Even when there's nothing going on, it's a great place to hang out, picnic by the river, and people-watch. Call the information center (✆ **07/3867 2051**) to find out what's on.
- **Attend a lecture, film, or gallery talk at the Queensland Art Gallery.** Free lectures and gallery talks on a topical artist or issue are held the first Wednesday of the month. A free "Sunday at the Gallery" program for children is run every second Sunday with lots of hands-on activities. Reservations are not necessary; just show up. Call ✆ **07/3840 7303** for details.
- **Watch the Queensland Parliament in action.** If Parliament is sitting (in session), the best show in town can sometimes be at Parliament House (see "More Attractions," below). Aussie politicians drop decorum in Parliament for no-holds-barred trading of taunts and insults that are sometimes banal, sometimes shocking, often funny. The free 10:30am tour at Question Time is the juiciest, when each party tries to goad the other.
- **Climb to the top of the City Hall clock tower.** For a fabulous view of the city, take the A$2 (US$1.60) elevator ride from the ground floor to the third floor, then climb the stairs to the glassed-in observation area. The clock tower is open Monday through Friday 10am to 3pm, Saturday 10am to 2:30pm. Closed Sunday and public holidays. If you're there on the quarter-hour, you'll get a close-up view of the chimes. Try not to be there at midday, when the clock chimes 12—it's deafening!
- **"Walking the walk" on the Mangrove Boardwalk.** The Mangrove Boardwalk extends 400m (¼ mile) out over the Brisbane River in the Brisbane City Gardens, along Alice Street. It's open and lit up until midnight. Free guided tours of the gardens are run Monday through Saturday at 11am and 1pm (except public holidays).
- **Check out the stunning St John's Anglican Cathedral.** At 373 Ann St., you can watch stonemasons work on the west end of the building, nearing completion after almost a century. Free guided tours of the cathedral are offered Monday through Saturday at 10am and 2pm, and Sunday at 2pm.

**Gallery of Modern Art,** will open, providing more space for the collections of modern and contemporary Australian, indigenous Australian, Asian, and Pacific art.

The **Queensland Museum** (✆ **07/3840 7555;** www.qmuseum.qld.gov.au), on the corner of Grey and Melbourne streets, underwent a major revamp in 2003 and looks the better for it. The museum houses an eclectic collection ranging from natural history specimens and fossils to a World War I German tank. Children will like the blue whale model; the dinosaurs, which include Queensland's own Muttaburrasaurus; and the interactive Sciencentre. The museum has a cafe and gift shop. Admission is free,

except to the Sciencentre and traveling exhibitions. Open daily 9:30am to 5pm; closed Good Friday, December 25, and until noon on April 25 (Anzac Day).

Adjacent to South Bank Parklands, across Victoria Bridge at western end of Queen St. ✆ **07/3840 7100.** Admission to Sciencentre A$9 (US$7.20) per person; A$28 (US$22) families of 6, A$7 (US$5.60) extra child ages 5–16. Ferry: South Bank (CityCat) or Old South Bank (Inner City Ferry). Bus: Numerous routes from Adelaide St. (near Albert St.), including 100, 111, 115, and 120, stop outside. Plentiful underground parking.

**South Bank Parklands** *Kids* Follow the locals' lead and spend some time at this delightful 16-hectare (40-acre) complex of parks, restaurants, shops, playgrounds, street theater, and weekend markets. There's a man-made beach, lined with palm trees, with real waves and sand, where you can swim, stroll, and cycle the pathways. Or sit over a latte in one of the cafes and enjoy the city views. From the parklands it's an easy stroll to the museum, art gallery, and other parts of the adjacent Queensland Cultural Centre (see above). The South Bank Parklands are a 7-minute walk from town.

South Bank. ✆ **07/3867 2051** for the Visitor Information Centre. Free admission. Park daily 24 hr.; Visitor Information Centre Sat–Thurs 9am–6pm, Fri 9am–8pm. Train: South Brisbane. Ferry: South Bank (CityCat or Cross River Ferry). Bus: Numerous routes from Adelaide St. (near Albert St.), including 100, 111, 115, and 120, stop at the Queensland Cultural Centre; walk through the Centre to South Bank Parklands. From the Queen Street Mall, cross the Victoria Bridge to South Bank or walk across Goodwill Bridge from Gardens Point Rd. entrance to Brisbane City Gardens. Plentiful underground parking in Queensland Cultural Centre.

## MORE ATTRACTIONS

**Australian Woolshed** *Overrated* If you've never seen a sheep or visited a farm, this might be a novelty for you, but don't be surprised if your Aussie friends cringe when you mention your intention to visit it. That said, this is a popular attraction with overseas visitors and school groups—you may have to contend with busloads of them. The ram show features eight trained Australian rams that "answer" to their names and walk through the audience to take their place beside their named spots on the stage. There's also sheep shearing, spinning, and sheepdog demonstrations, and you can get your hands dirty classing wool, milking cows, feeding kangaroos, and cuddling koalas (a photo costs A$15/US$12). The gift shop has quality Australian-made souvenirs. A rustic restaurant serves Aussie specialties, including billy tea and damper (a traditional bread). On some Friday and Saturday nights—usually about once a month—the Woolshed hosts a traditional bush dance and dinner, featuring country dancing, spoon-playing, singalongs, a live band, and a two-course dinner. Tickets cost A$40 (US$32) per person. The fun starts at 7pm. Reservations are essential.

148 Samford Rd., Ferny Hills. ✆ **07/3872 1100.** www.auswoolshed.com.au. Admission to ram show A$18 (US$14) adults, A$14 (US$11) seniors and students, A$13 (US$10) children 3–14, A$49 (US$39) families (2 adults, 3 children). Billy tea and damper A$7 (US$5.60) adults, A$4.50 (US$3.60) children 3–14. Water slide A$7 (US$5.60) for 1 hr., A$11 (US$8.80) for 4 hr. Minigolf A$5.50 (US$4.40) for 9 holes. Daily 8:30am–4:30pm (ram show 9:30,11am, 1, and 2:30pm). Closed Dec 25 and until noon Apr 25 (Anzac Day). Train: Ferny Grove (station is 800m/2,624 ft. from the Woolshed). By car, Kelvin Grove Rd. from the city becomes Enoggera Rd., then Samford Rd.; the trip is 14km (8½ miles). Large off-street free parking lot.

**Brisbane Botanic Gardens Mount Coot-tha** These 52-hectare (128-acre) gardens at the base of Mount Coot-tha feature Aussie natives and exotics you probably won't see at home. The gardens include an arid zone, a Tropical Dome conservatory housing rainforest plants, a cactus house, a bonsai house, fragrant plants, a Japanese garden, African and American plants, wetlands, and a bamboo grove. There are lakes and trails, usually a horticultural show or arts-and-crafts display in the auditorium on

weekends, and a cafe. Free 1-hour guided tours leave the kiosk at 11am and 1pm Monday through Saturday (except public holidays).

Mt. Coot-tha Rd., Toowong (7km/4 miles from the city). ✆ **07/3403 8888.** www.brisbane.qld.gov.au. Free admission to Botanic Gardens. Sept–Mar daily 8am–5:30pm; Apr–Aug daily 8am–5pm. Bus: 471. Free parking.

**Museum of Brisbane** Opened in late 2003, this smallish museum in the historic City Hall is designed to capture the history and essence of Brisbane. There's a theater that shows a short film about the city and a shop that stocks "made in Brisbane" items. Changing exhibitions relate the stories, events, and ideas that have shaped the city, as well as giving practical information for visitors. It is a good starting point for your visit.

City Hall, King George Sq. ✆ **07/3403 8888.** www.brisbane.qld.gov.au/MoB. Free admission. Daily 10am–5pm. Closed Dec 25 and until noon Apr 25 (Anzac Day).

**Newstead House** ★ Brisbane's oldest surviving home has been restored to its late Victorian splendor in a peaceful park overlooking the Brisbane River. Wander the rooms, admire the gracious exterior dating from 1846, and on Sunday between March and November, take Devonshire tea. The U.S. Army occupied the house during World War II, and the first American war memorial built in Australia stands on Newstead Point, on the grounds.

Newstead Park, Breakfast Creek Rd., Newstead. ✆ **1800/061 846** in Australia, or 07/3216 1846. www.newsteadhouse.com.au. Admission A$4.40 (US$3.50) adults, A$3.30 (US$2.65) seniors and students, A$2.20 (US$1.75) children 6–16, A$11 (US$8.80) families. Mon–Fri 10am–4pm; Sun 2–5pm. Last admittance 30 min. before closing. Closed Good Friday, Apr 25 (Anzac Day), Dec 24–Jan 1, and other public holidays. Bus: 300 or 302. Limited parking.

**Parliament House** Queensland's seat of government was built in 1868 in an odd but happy mix of French Renaissance and tropical colonial styles. It's impressive from the outside, and guided 30-minute tours (20 min. at weekends) show off its ornate interior of Waterford chandeliers, Colebrookdale balustrades, and the gold-leaf ceilings in the Council Chamber. When Parliament is in session, the tour is restricted, but you can see Parliament in action. The House is on Brisbane's Heritage Trail (see "City Strolls," below) and the City Sights tour bus (see "Bus Tours," in section 6, below).

George St. (at Alice St.). ✆ **07/3406 7562.** Free admission, tours. Tours Mon–Fri 9am–4:15pm; Sat–Sun 10am–2pm when Parliament is not in session; Mon–Fri 10:30am and 2:30pm when Parliament is in session. Bus: Downtown Loop. Ferry: Queensland University of Technology (QUT) Gardens Point.

**Roma Street Parkland** Thousands of plants, including natives and some of the world's most endangered, have been used to create lush subtropical gardens in an unused railway yard. The effect is stunning. Areas of the gardens are themed. Free guided walks run Thursday through Sunday and on public holidays twice a day (10am and 2pm Sept–May, 11am and 2pm June–Aug), and self-guided walking tours for each theme area are available. The "art walk" helps visitors discover the interesting public art on display. On the premises are barbecues, picnic areas, and a playground. From King George Square, the park is about a 500m (1,640-ft.) walk along Albert Street.

Roma St.; information booths in Spectacle Garden and at Activity Centre. ✆ **07/3006 4545.** www.romastreetparkland.com. Free admission. Daily 24 hr.; Spectacle Garden daily from dawn to dusk. Train: Roma St. Station. By car, enter from Roma St. or the Wickham Terrace/College Rd./Gregory Terrace intersection.

## CITY STROLLS

Because Brisbane is leafy, warm, and full of colonial-era Queenslander architecture, it is a great city for strolling. Pick up one of the free Heritage Trail Maps from the Brisbane Marketing information booth (see "Visitor Information," earlier in this chapter)

and explore on your own. The map books include a history of the area and excellent detailed information of historic buildings and other sights along the way.

A new "floating" **River Walk** connects more than 20km (13 miles) of pathways, roads, bridges, and parks along the Brisbane River. You can stroll along River Walk on the north bank of the river between the University of Queensland at St. Lucia and Teneriffe, and on the south bank from the West End ferry terminal at Orleigh Park to Dockside at Kangaroo Point.

For organized walking tours, see below.

## 6 River Cruises & Other Organized Tours

**RIVER CRUISES** The best way to cruise the river, in my view, is aboard the fast **CityCat ferries** ★★. It's also the cheapest. Board at Riverside and head downstream under the Story Bridge to New Farm Park, past Newstead House to the restaurant row at Brett's Wharves; or cruise upriver past the city and South Bank to the University of Queensland's lovely campus. (Take a look at its impressive Great Court while you're there.) This trip in either direction will set you back a whole A$3.80 (US$3.05) per person. Or you can stay on for the full trip, which takes about 2 hours. For more information, see "Getting Around," earlier in this chapter. Cruises along the Brisbane River aboard the **Kookaburra River Queen paddle wheelers** (✆ **07/3221 1300;** www.kookaburrariverqueens.com) are a good way to take in the Queenslander homes, historic buildings, and tropical foliage—especially in October and November when the jacaranda trees bloom. The boat departs from South Bank and picks up at the Eagle Street Pier. The cheapest option is the A$25 (US$20) Devonshire tea fare (or you can pay more for a full meal). Children pay half price; seniors get a 15% discount.

**BUS TOURS** For a good introduction to Brisbane, look no further than a City Sights bus tour run by **Brisbane City Council** (✆ **13 12 30** in Australia, or 07/3403 8888), which also entitles you to unlimited access to the buses, ferries, and CityCats for the day, as well as discounts to some attractions. **City Sights** buses stop at 19 points of interest in a continuous loop around the city center, Spring Hill, Milton, South Bank, and Fortitude Valley, including Chinatown. They take in various historical buildings and places of interest. The driver of the blue-and-yellow bus narrates, and you can hop on and off at any stop you like. The bus departs every 45 minutes from 9am to 3:45pm daily except Good Friday, April 25 (Anzac Day), and December 25. The whole trip, without stopping, takes 90 minutes. Tickets cost A$20 (US$16) for adults, A$15 (US$12) for children 5 to 15. Buy your ticket on board. You can join anywhere along the route, but the most central stop is City Hall, Stop 2, on Adelaide Street at Albert Street.

**WALKING TOURS** The Brisbane City Council has a wonderful program called **Gone Walking** (✆ **07/3403 8888**). About 70 free guided walks are run each week from somewhere in the city or suburbs, exploring all kinds of territory, from bushland to heritage buildings to riverscapes to cemeteries. The walks are aimed at locals, not tourists, so you get to explore Brisbane side by side with the townsfolk. Every walk has a flexible distance option and usually lasts about an hour. Most are easy, but some are more demanding. Most start and finish near public transport and end near a food outlet.

Prepare for shivers up your spine if you take one of Jack Sim's **Ghost Tours** ★ (✆ **07/3844 6606**), which relive Brisbane's gruesome past. Three regular tours are run, taking in the historic Toowong and South Brisbane cemeteries and the now-disused

Boggo Road Gaol. Cemetery tours are on Saturday nights and cost A$30 or A$40 (US$24 or US$32) for adults. Gaol tours are held on Sunday nights and cost A$30 (US$24) adults. Reservations are essential; no children under 12.

Free guided walks of the Brisbane **City Gardens** (✆ **07/3403 8888**) at Alice Street leave from the rotunda at the Albert Street entrance Monday through Saturday at 11am and 1pm (except public holidays and the first Mon of each month).

Read and walk the **Albert Street Literary Trail,** the best way to experience the city from a writer's view! Pick up a map from any Brisbane City Council Service Centre, ward office, or library (✆ **07/3403 8888**).

## 7 Outdoor Pursuits in Brisbane

### ACTIVITIES

**ABSEILING** The **Kangaroo Point** cliffs south of the Story Bridge are a breeze for first-time abseilers (rappelers), or so they say. Adventure company **WorthWild** (✆ **07/3395 6450;** www.worthwild.com.au) runs abseiling for beginners on Saturdays from 8 to 11:30am, usually about twice a month. It costs A$75 (US$60) per person, and you can abseil down as many times as you like during the session—most people get 8 to 10 descents in.

**BIKING** Bike tracks, often shared with pedestrians and in-line skaters, stretch for 400km (248 miles) around Brisbane. One great scenic route, about 9km (5½ miles) long, starts just west of the Story Bridge, sweeps through the Brisbane City Gardens, and follows the river all the way to the University of Queensland campus at St. Lucia. **Brisbane Bicycle Sales and Hire,** 87 Albert St. (✆ **07/3229 2433;** www.brizbike.com), will rent you a bike and furnish you with the Brisbane City Council's free detailed bike maps. Rentals start at A$12 (US$9.60) for 1 hour and go up to A$25 (US$20) for the day; overnight rentals (A$45/US$36) are available. The price includes helmets, which are compulsory in Australia. **Valet Cycle Hire** (✆ **07/3630 2772,** or 0408/003 198 mobile; www.cyclebrisbane.com) operates from the bicycle station in the City Botanic Gardens, near the Alice Street gate, from 9:30am to late afternoon.

*Moments* **Brisbane's Bridge Climb**

Brisbane boasts nine bridges across its wide river. The most interesting is the Story Bridge, built in 1940. If you are taller than 130 centimeters (51 in.) or older than 12, you can "climb" this overgrown Meccano set. The Story Bridge Adventure Climb peaks at a viewing platform on top of the bridge, 44m (143 ft.) above the roadway and 80m (262 ft.) above the Brisbane River. Launched in late 2005, this is one of only three "bridge climbs" in the world (after Sydney's and Auckland's), so make the most of the chance. You'll be rewarded with magnificent 360-degree views of the city, river, and Moreton Bay and its islands. The cost is A$100 to A$120 (US$80–US$96) for adults (depending on your day of the week and time of day—twilight climbs are the most expensive) and from A$75 (US$60) for kids 12 to 16 years old. Climbs run from dawn to after dusk, leaving at 20-minute intervals. For more, check www.storybridgeadventureclimb.com.au or call ✆ **07/3514 6900.**

The cost is A$15 (US$12) for 1 hour or A$20 (US$16) for 2 hours. You can also have your bike delivered by "valet" to all city area accommodations for A$30 (US$24) for 4 hours or A$40 (US$32) for the day. The Brisbane City Council at City Hall (✆ **07/3403 8888**) and Brisbane Marketing's information booth (see "Visitor Information," earlier in this chapter) also give out bike maps.

**BUSHWALKING** **Brisbane Forest Park,** a 29,000-hectare (71,250-acre) expanse of bushland, waterfalls, and rainforest a 20-minute drive north of the city, has many hiking trails from just a few hundred meters long up to 8km (5 miles). Some tracks have themes—one highlights the native mammals in the park. Another hike, the 1.8km (1-mile) Mt. Coot-tha Aboriginal Art Trail, showcases contemporary Aboriginal art with tree carvings, rock paintings, etchings, and a dance pit. Most walks depart from one of seven regional centers that are up to a 20-minute drive from headquarters, so you will need a car. Make a day of it and pack a picnic. **Park Headquarters** (✆ **07/3300 4855;** www.brisbaneforestpark.qld.gov.au) is at 60 Mt. Nebo Rd., The Gap, where there's a wildlife display, restaurant, crafts shop, and information center.

**IN-LINE SKATING** In-line skaters can use the network of bike and pedestrian paths. See "Biking," above, for locations that distribute maps, or just head down to the Brisbane City Gardens at Alice Street and find your own way along the river. **SkateBiz,** 101 Albert St. (✆ **07/3220 0157**), rents blades for A$13 (US$10) for 2 hours or A$20 (US$16) for up to 24 hours. Protective gear is included. Take a photo ID. The store is open Monday through Thursday from 9am to 5:30pm, Friday 9am to 9pm, Saturday 9am to 4pm, and Sunday 10am to 4pm.

**JOGGING** Take any pedestrian/bike path (see "Biking," above, for information about where to find a bike map) or head to the City Botanic Gardens and out along the river.

## SPECTATOR SPORTS

Aussie Rules football and cricket are played at "The Gabba," as Aussies call **Brisbane Cricket Ground,** 411 Vulture St. (at Stanley St.), Woolloongabba, a 5-minute drive south of the city. Call **TransLink** (✆ **13 12 30**) for details on buses.

**AUSTRALIAN RULES FOOTBALL (AFL)** The Brisbane Lions are the local heroes in this uniquely Aussie sport. Ticket prices start at about A$21 (US$17); book through **Ticketek** (✆ **132 849** in Australia; http://premier.ticketek.com.au). The season begins in late March and ends in late August. Most games are played on Saturday nights or Sunday afternoons.

**CRICKET** Boring to some, fascinating to others, cricket is big business in Australia, and some of the most important national and international matches are played in Brisbane from October to late February. Most matches are played midweek and weekends during the day; a few are played at night. Tickets cost up to about A$70 (US$56). Book through **Ticketmaster** (✆ **13 61 22;** www.ticketmaster7.com).

# 8 The Shopping Scene

Brisbane's best shopping centers are on the **Queen Street Mall,** which has around 500 stores. Fronting the mall at 171–209 Queen St., under the Hilton, is the three-level **Wintergarden** shopping complex (✆ **07/3229 9755**), housing upscale jewelers and Aussie fashion designers. Farther up the mall at 91 Queen St. (at Albert St.) is the **Myer Centre** (✆ **07/3223 6900**), which has Brisbane's biggest department store and

five levels of moderately priced stores, mostly fashion. The **Brisbane Arcade,** 160 Queen Street Mall (✆ **07/3221 5977**), abounds with the boutiques of local Queensland designers. Just down the mall from it is the **Broadway on the Mall** arcade (✆ **07/3229 5233**), which stocks affordable fashion, gifts, and accessories on two levels. Across from the Edward Street end of the mall is a smart new fashion and lifestyle shopping precinct, **MacArthur Central** (✆ **07/3007 2300**), right next door to the GPO on the block between Queen and Elizabeth streets. This is where you'll find top-name designer labels, Swiss watches, galleries, and accessory shops.

The trendy suburb of **Paddington,** just a few minutes from the city by cab (or take the no. 144 bus to Bardon), is the place for antiques, books, art, crafts, one-of-a-kind clothing designs, and unusual gifts. The shops—colorfully painted Queenslander cottages—line the main street, Given Terrace, which becomes Latrobe Terrace. Don't miss the second wave of shops around the bend.

You will find housewares and fashion boutiques, galleries, one or two antiques shops, cafes, and restaurants on **Park Road,** linking Coronation Drive and Milton Road in Milton. Parking is difficult, so take the Ipswich train from the Central or Roma Street station to the Milton station. Park Road is around the corner from the station.

**SHOPPING HOURS** Brisbane shops are open Monday through Thursday from 8:30am to 5:30pm, Friday 8:30am to 9pm, Saturday 8:30am to 5pm, and Sunday 10:30am to 4pm. On Friday evening in the city, the Queen Street Mall is abuzz with cinemagoers and revelers; the late (until 9pm) shopping night in Paddington is Thursday.

**MARKETS** Authentic retro '50s and '60s fashion, offbeat stuff like old LPs, secondhand crafts, fashion by up-and-coming young designers, and all kinds of junk and treasures are for sale at Brisbane's only alternative market, **Valley Markets,** Brunswick Street and Chinatown malls, Fortitude Valley (✆ **07/3006 6200**). Hang around in one of the many coffee shops and listen to live music. It's open Saturday and Sunday from 8am to 4pm.

Friday night is a fun time to visit the **South Bank Art and Craft Markets,** Stanley Street Plaza, South Bank Parklands (✆ **0414/888 041** mobile), when fairy lights illuminate the buzzing outdoor handicrafts market. The market is open Friday from 5 to 10pm, Saturday from 11am to 5pm, and Sunday from 9am to 5pm.

Brisbane folk like trawling the **Riverside Markets** at the Riverside Centre, 123 Eagle St. (✆ **07/3870 2807**), and the adjacent Eagle Street Pier Craft and Deli Markets (✆ **0414/888 041** mobile) for attractive housewares, colorful pottery, wooden blanket chests, handmade toys, painted flowerpots, and other stylish wares. It's open Sunday from 8am to 4pm.

For an authentic taste of Queensland's best produce, the **Farmers Markets** (✆ **0439/999 009**) operate on the second and fourth Saturday of each month, from 7am to noon, in the grounds of the Brisbane Powerhouse, Lamington Street, New Farm. Here you'll find much to tempt your palate, brought into the city by farmers from around the southeast part of the state. There are about 100 stalls, selling everything from fresh fruit and vegetables to homemade chutneys, quail, fresh seafood, free-range eggs, and pâtés. Foodies will be in heaven.

## 9 Brisbane After Dark

You can find out about festivals, concerts, and events, and book tickets through **Ticketek** (✆ **13 28 49** in Queensland; www.ticketek.com). You can book in person at

Ticketek agencies, the most convenient of which are on Level E at the Myer Centre, 91 Queen Street Mall, and in the Visitor Information Centre at South Bank Parklands. Or try **Ticketmaster** (✆ **13 61 00** in Australia; www.ticketmaster7.com).

**QTIX** (✆ **13 62 46** in Australia; www.qtix.com.au) is a major booking agent for performing arts and classical music, including all events at the Queensland Performing Arts Centre (QPAC). There is a A$2.75 (US$2.20) booking fee per ticket. You can book in person at the box office at QPAC Monday to Saturday from 8:30am to 9pm, and at the South Bank Parklands Visitor Information Centre (✆ **07/3867 2051**).

The free weekly newspaper *Brisbane News* lists performing arts, jazz and classical music performances, art exhibitions, rock concerts, and public events. The free weekly *TimeOff,* published on Wednesday and available in bars and cafes, is a good guide to live music, as is Thursday's *Courier-Mail* newspaper.

## THE PERFORMING ARTS

Most of Brisbane's performing arts happen at the Queensland Performing Arts Centre (QPAC) at Queensland Cultural Centre (see "Exploring Brisbane," earlier in this chapter). For information and tickets, contact QTIX (see above).

### THEATER

**Brisbane Powerhouse–Centre for the Live Arts** A former electricity powerhouse, the massive brick structure is now a dynamic art space for exhibitions, performance, and live art. The building retains its unique character, an industrial mix of metal, glass, and stark surfaces etched with 20 years of graffiti. It's a short walk from the New Farm ferry terminal along the riverfront through New Farm Park. 119 Lamington St., New Farm. ✆ **07/3358 8600.** www.brisbanepowerhouse.com.au. Ticket prices vary from free to A$100 (US$80) or more.

**La Boite Theatre** ★ This well-established and respected innovative company performs contemporary Australian plays in the round. Its home is the new 400-seat Roundhouse Theatre in a new Cultural Industries Precinct just outside the city center. 6 Musk Ave., Kelvin Grove. ✆ **07/3007 8600.** www.laboite.com.au. Tickets cost A$38–A$50 (US$30–US$40), previews A$33 (US$26). Take bus no. 390 from the city to Kelvin Grove Road and get off at stop no. 7.

**Queensland Theatre Company** ★ The state theater company offers eight or nine productions a year, from the classics to new Australian works. It attracts some of the country's best actors and directors. Most performances are at the Playhouse or Cremorne Theatre at the Queensland Performing Arts Centre (QPAC), South Bank. Performing at the Playhouse and Cremorne Theatre at the Queensland Performing Arts Centre (QPAC), South Bank. ✆ **07/3010 7600.** www.qldtheatreco.com.au. Tickets cost A$19–A$55 (US$15–US$44).

### CLASSICAL MUSIC

**The Brisbane City Council** (✆ **07/3403 8888**) sponsors free lunchtime concerts in City Hall most Tuesdays, and sometimes on other days, too, usually from 12:30 to 1:30pm. Performers range from classical to Aboriginal, world music, and jazz to percussion/folk fusion and military bands.

**The Queensland Orchestra** This group provides classical music lovers with a diverse mix of orchestral and chamber music, with the odd foray into fun material, such as movie themes, Cole Porter hits, and gospel; the orchestra presents about 30 concerts a year. Free talks are given in the foyer 1 hour before all major performances.

The occasional "Tea and Symphony" concerts at City Hall include tea and coffee. Performing at the Concert Hall in the Queensland Performing Arts Centre (QPAC), City Hall, and intimate works at its studios at 53 Ferry Rd., West End. ✆ **07/3377 5000.** www.thequeenslandorchestra.com.au. Tickets A$43–A$56 (US$34–US$45); A$32 (US$26) if you are a full-time student or under 26.

### OPERA

**Opera Queensland** The state company performs a lively repertoire of traditional opera as well as modern works, musicals, and choral concerts. Free talks on the opera you are about to see start in the foyer 45 minutes before every performance, and free close-up tours of the set are held after every performance (except the final night); book ahead through QTIX (✆ **13 62 46;** www.qtix.com.au). Lyric Theatre at the Queensland Performing Arts Centre (QPAC). ✆ **07/3875 3035.** www.operaqueensland.com.au. Tickets A$35–A$129 (US$28–US$103), A$40 (US$32) at some performances if you're age 30 or under.

## THE CLUB & MUSIC SCENE

### NIGHTCLUBS

**Downunder Bar** In the basement of the Palace Backpackers, this is Brisbane's only dedicated backpacker and university-student party bar open daily, so it's packed every night. There are nightly specials and giveaways, and the emphasis is on fun. Open Monday through Friday noon to 3am, and Saturday and Sunday 5pm to 3am. Palace Backpackers, corner Ann and Edward sts. ✆ **07/3211 2433.**

**Empire Hotel** Friday and Saturday nights find this Heritage-listed pub packed with the Hip, the Young, and the Beautiful. Don't come here in a suit, and forget about it if you're over 35—you're not welcome. Super-cool groovers dance to an all-night beat upstairs in three bars, and most nights a DJ plays. There are four bars, including the intimate booth-lined Pressclub, and a retro style cocktail lounge. 339 Brunswick St. (at Ann St.), New Farm. ✆ **07/3852 1216.**

**Friday's** This indoor/outdoor bar, restaurant, and nightclub complex overlooking the Brisbane River is a haunt for "the Zoolander generation" of 18- to 40-year-olds. Gather on the large outdoor terrace with its huge island bar, or head for the restaurant, supper club, or dance floor. Music spans acid jazz, urban groove, and dance anthems from resident DJs, with the latest R&B, soul, and funk by live bands. Wednesday through Saturday nights see some kind of happy-hour deal, cocktail club, or drinks special; the dance action starts pumping around 9pm on Friday and Saturday. Upstairs in Riverside Centre, 123 Eagle St. ✆ **07/3832 2122.** Cover A$7–A$10 (US$5.60–US$8). Ferry: CityCat to Riverside.

**Zenbar** Minimalist Manhattan-style interiors with an 8m-high (26-ft.) glass wall overlooking a bamboo garden make this one of the hippest joints in town. It's a restaurant as well, but the bar is packed on Friday and Saturday night with office workers and beautiful people. There are about 40 wines by the glass, but in this kind of place you should be drinking a margarita or martini. The music ranges from '70s underground jazz and lounge to ultramodern funk house on Friday; on Saturday, the mood changes to easy background music. Park level, Post Office Sq., 215 Adelaide St. ✆ **07/3211 2333.** Train: Central.

### COOL SPOTS FOR JAZZ & BLUES

**Brisbane Jazz Club** ★ *finds* On the riverfront under the Story Bridge, this is the only Australian jazz club still featuring big band dance music (every Sun night). Watch out for the slightly sloping dance floor—it was once a boat ramp! Traditional and mainstream jazz is featured on Saturday nights. It's open Saturday 7:30 to 11:30pm,

## Finds Brisbane's Historic Pubs

Brisbane's attractive historic pubs, many of them recently revitalized, have wide, shady verandas and beer gardens just perfect for whiling away a sunny afternoon or catching a quick meal at night.

The best known is the **Breakfast Creek Hotel,** 2 Kingsford Smith Dr., Breakfast Creek (✆ **07/3262 5988;** see "Great Deals on Dining," earlier in this chapter). Built in 1889, the hotel is a Brisbane institution. For many people, a visit to the city isn't complete without a steak and beer "off the wood" at the Brekky Creek.

Another landmark is the **Regatta Hotel,** 543 Coronation Dr., Toowong (✆ **07/3871 9595**). This heritage hotel with three stories of iron-lace balconies is the perfect spot for a cool drink overlooking the Brisbane River. Since its multimillion-dollar renovation in 2002, the place bursts at the seams on weekends. The new Boat Shed restaurant (✆ **07/3871 9533**) is popular but not inexpensive—tables around the hotel verandas are a better choice.

Not far from the Regatta is the **Royal Exchange Hotel,** High Street, Toowong (✆ **07/3371 2555**). Known simply as "the RE," it's popular with students, probably because of its proximity to the University of Queensland. It has a great garden bar at the back.

The **Story Bridge Hotel,** 200 Main St., Kangaroo Point (✆ **07/3391 2266**), is well known as the venue for some of Brisbane's most unusual events, such as the annual Australia Day (Jan 26) cockroach races. Built in 1886, the pub is also a great place to find live music. In 2003 it was refurbished to the tune of A$3.2 million (US$2.6 million), creating a new restaurant and bar literally built into the base of the bridge and a new beer garden under the bridge.

Another of the city's oldest pubs is the **Plough Inn** (✆ **07/3844 7777**) at South Bank Parklands, which has stood its ground through major changes in the neighborhood since 1885. There's even a ghost, they say . . .

Sunday 7:30 to 10:30pm, and sometimes Friday 6:30 to 10:30 or 11:30pm; phone and check what's on before heading over. 1 Annie St., Kangaroo Point. ✆ **07/3391 2006.** www.brisbanejazzclub.com.au. Cover usually A$12 (US$9.60), higher for some guest acts. Ferry: CityCat to Holman St. Free parking lot.

**Holiday Inn Jazz-n-Blues Bar** One of Brisbane's leading live jazz venues is in an unlikely setting: a busy hotel. A mixed crowd in their 20s to 40s turns up to hear local, Australian, and international acts. Get there early—the place seats just 30, and the rest is standing room only. Open Wednesday, Thursday, and Saturday 6pm to late, and Friday at 4pm to late. Ground floor of the hotel, next to Brisbane Transit Centre, Roma St. ✆ **07/3238 2222.** Cover charge varies. Train: Roma St.

## THE CASINO

**Treasury Casino** This lovely heritage building—built in 1886 as, ironically enough, the state's Treasury offices—houses a modern casino. Three levels of 100 gaming tables offer roulette, blackjack, baccarat, craps, sic-bo, and traditional Aussie two-up. There

are more than 1,000 slot machines, five restaurants, and seven bars. It's open 24 hours. Live bands appear nightly in the Livewire Bar, and there's stand-up comedy on Wednesday night in the Premier's Bar. Queen St. between George and William sts. ✆ **07/3306 8888.** Must be 18 years old to enter; neat casual attire required (no beachwear or thongs). Closed Good Friday, Dec 25, and until 1pm April 25 (Anzac Day). Train: Central or South Brisbane, then walk across the Victoria Bridge.

## 10 Moreton Bay & Islands

The Brisbane River runs into beautiful Moreton Bay, studded with hundreds of small islands—and a few large ones. Some, such as the former quarantine station and leper colony of Peel Island and Bird and Goat islands, can be reached only by private vessel. Others are national parks, and some are accessible either by tour boat or public ferry.

### NORTH STRADBROKE ISLAND

A popular holiday spot for Brisbane families is **North Stradbroke Island,** one of the world's largest sand islands, with long white beaches fringing the east coast and fishing towns strung along the sheltered western side of the island.

**GETTING THERE & GETTING AROUND** **Stradbroke Ferries** (✆ **07/3286 2666**) operates water-taxi service from Toondah Harbour, Middle Street, Cleveland, to Dunwich (about 30 min.), on North Stradbroke Island; the round-trip fare is A$15 (US$12) for adults, A$10 (US$8) for children 5 to 14. The vehicle barge (✆ **07/3488 9777**) accepts walk-on passengers for A$11 (US$8.80) round-trip; the trip takes about 45 minutes. A bus meets almost every water taxi or ferry at Dunwich and connects it with the other two main settlements, Amity and Point Lookout. The trip to either place takes about 30 minutes and costs A$9 (US$7.20) round-trip for adults.

To get to Cleveland by public transport from Brisbane, take the train from Central Station to Cleveland Station (A$4/US$3.20), then walk about 300m (about ¼ mile) to Middle Street.

**VISITOR INFORMATION** The **Tourist Information Centre** (✆ **07/3409 9555**) is on Junner Street, Dunwich, about 200m (656 ft.) from the ferry terminal. It is open weekdays from 8:30am to 5pm and weekends 9am to 3pm.

**WHAT TO SEE & DO** **North Stradbroke Island,** "Straddie" to the locals, was once home to a large Aboriginal population and still retains much of its history. The main town, where the ferry or water taxi will drop you, is **Dunwich.** Over the years the town has been a convict outstation, Catholic mission, quarantine station, and benevolent institution. The local museum is open Wednesday and Saturday 10am to 2pm and displays historic photographs, items salvaged from shipwrecks, and information about the early settlement of the island. A self-guided historical walk begins at the information center, where you can pick up a free map. **Point Lookout,** at the northern tip of the island, is Queensland's most easterly point. A must for all visitors is the **North Gorge Headlands Walk,** for breathtaking views and for spotting turtles, dolphins, and whales. There are plenty of places to stay on the island, at motels, low-key resorts, caravan parks, and camping grounds.

### SOUTH STRADBROKE ISLAND

South Stradbroke is accessible from Hope Harbour, about 45 minutes' drive south of Brisbane city. There are three resorts on the island and four camping grounds. The resorts run boats for guests only, so the only other way to get to the island is by water

# Moreton Bay & Islands

taxi. **Gold Coast Water Taxi** (✆ **0418/759 789** mobile) takes groups to the island for A$90 (US$72) per transfer (10 people with no luggage, or 6 people plus camping gear). **Couran Cove Island Resort** runs day tours for A$65 (US$52) per person, which includes return transfers from Hope Harbour, morning tea, guided rainforest tour, lunch, and use of resort facilities for the rest of the afternoon. The Fastcat ferry leaves Hope Harbour at 10:30am, and you can return on either the 3 or 5pm boat.

## WHERE TO STAY

### Worth a Splurge

**Couran Cove Island Resort** ★★★ *Finds* You'll be lucky to find a more peaceful resort than this one, which is an island idyll in a class of its own. South Stradbroke Island has no cars—everyone gets around on foot, bicycle, or silent electric shuttle. And whether you're a beach or bush person, you'll find it here. You can hang around the pools or lagoon, head to the spectacular surf beach about 2km (1¼ miles) from the main resort, or stroll through remnants of primeval rainforest. The resort is committed to environmentally friendly practices and is unique for its range of more than 100 recreational and sporting activities, including a 9m (30-ft.) rock-climbing wall, three-lane sprint track, baseball and softball pitching cage, and High Ropes Challenge course. There's also beach volleyball, bocce and lawn bowls, shuffleboard, surfing, fishing, a stargazing observatory, an extensive day spa, and a resident artist who gives lessons. There are lots of accommodations choices. My favorite is a nature cabin in the bush, but for water views and closer access to the restaurants and spa, choose one of the colorful waterfront units. All have kitchens, and there's a general store and a pantry service that delivers supplies to your room. Waterfront units are air-conditioned, and other accommodations have ceiling fans; marine resort rooms have minibars. Smoking is allowed only in designated outdoor areas and on balconies, and no tobacco products are sold at the resort.

South Stradbroke Island, Moreton Bay (P.O. Box 224, Runaway Bay), QLD 4216. ✆ **1800/268 726** in Australia, or 07/5509 3000. Fax 07/5509 3001. www.couran.com. 357 units. Nature cabin for 3–8 from A$243 (US$194) per night, 3-night minimum; Waterfront room from A$317 (US$254) double, no minimum. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 4 restaurants; poolside cafe; 10-lane heated pool and children's pool; driving range; putting green; free transfers to mainland golf courses; 2 tennis courts; 2 fully equipped exercise rooms; spa; extensive watersports equipment rentals; bike rental; children's programs; ½-acre adventure playground; game room; tour desk; massage; babysitting; laundry service; dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C (in some), TV w/pay movies, VCR, fax, dataport, kitchen, minibar (in some), hair dryer, safe.

## MORETON ISLAND

At more than 200 sq. km (77 sq. miles) in area, Moreton is the second-largest sand mass in the world (after Queensland's Fraser Island) and has the world's largest sand hill, **Mt. Tempest.** There are three settlements and the **Tangalooma Wild Dolphin Resort,** where guests and visitors can take part in hand-feeding a pod of wild dolphins, which come in to the jetty each evening. It's an experience for which they line up in great anticipation, but be warned—it is highly regulated, you can't touch the dolphins, and it's over in a few seconds! Moreton has some other claims to fame: You can visit the 41-hectare (102-acre) "desert" and toboggan down the sand dunes. Or you can snorkel around the 12 wrecks just north of the resort and visit historic points of interest including the sandstone lighthouse at **Cape Moreton,** built in 1857. A 4WD is essential for getting around, but tours are run from the resort. Permits for access (A$33/US$26 per vehicle) and camping (A$4/US$3.20 per person or A$16/US$13 for families of six per night) are available from national park rangers and ferry operators.

**GETTING THERE** The high-speed catamarans ***Tangalooma Flyer*** and ***Tangalooma Jet*** (✆ **1300/652 250**) leave Brisbane's Pinkenba wharf at Eagle Farm for Tangalooma on Moreton Island three times daily, at 8am (6 on Mon), 10am, and 5pm (noon on Sat–Sun). The trip takes 75 minutes. For a A$5 (US$4) charge, coaches pick up passengers at the Roma Street Transit Centre to connect with the launch and will pick up from city hotels on request. Return transfers leave Tangalooma at 9am and 4pm and after the evening dolphin feeding session every day. On weekends, they also leave at 2pm. The round-trip fare is A$56 (US$45) for adults and A$28 (US$22) for children 3 to 14. The ***Combie Trader*** vehicular and passenger ferry (✆ **07/3203 6399;** www.moreton-island.com) departs from Scarborough on the Redcliffe Peninsula for Bulwer at least once a day (departure times vary). The trip takes about 2 hours; round-trip fares for walk-on passengers are A$35 (US$28) adults, A$30 (US$24) students over 15, and A$20 (US$16) children 5 to 15. The cost to take a four-wheel-drive and up to five passengers is A$155 (US$124). Day trips operate on Saturday (11am–4pm) and cost A$20 (US$16) adults, A$12 (US$9.60) children 5 to 15, and A$85 (US$68) families of four. Combie Trader also runs four-wheel-drive trips to the island on Monday, Tuesday, Friday, and Sunday. The cost—A$85 (US$68) adults and A$60 (US$48) children under 14—includes the ferry crossing, full day tour, and lunch. Times are subject to change.

To reach Scarborough by public transit from Brisbane, take bus no. 315 (Redcliffe Express) from stop 57, on Queen Street opposite Post Office Square, to Scarborough North and walk about 500m (½ mile). The fare is A$4 (US$3.20) for adults, half price for children. The trip takes 60 to 90 minutes.

## WHERE TO STAY

### Tangalooma Wild Dolphin Resort ★ Kids

Once the Southern Hemisphere's largest whaling station, Tangalooma is the only resort on Moreton Island. Its big attraction is the pod of wild dolphins that visits the jetty each evening. Guests are guaranteed one chance during their visit to hand-feed the dolphins, but you can't swim with or touch the dolphins. The feeding is regulated, and your turn is over in a few seconds. Day-trippers can also take part in dolphin feeding for a cost of A$85 (US$68) adults and A$45 (US$36) children 3 to 14, as part of a day cruise. Tangalooma is a good base for exploring the island, and a variety of tours are available, among them seasonal (late June to Oct) whale-watching cruises for a rate of A$95 (US$76) adults, A$55 (US$44) children 3 to 14. A dolphin research center is also based here. In 2002, the resort gained 96 new hotel rooms; 56 modern two-story family villas are only a year or so older. Villas are pricier than regular rooms, and a little farther from the resort facilities. Each has a full kitchen. The new hotel rooms sleep up to four and have such amenities as air-conditioning, minibars, and hair dryers, which the other rooms do not. However, older rooms have kitchenettes. Units in the main resort area sleep four to five people, and each has a private balcony. A general store is on-site.

Moreton Island, off Brisbane (P.O. Box 1102, Eagle Farm), QLD 4009. ✆ **1300/652 250** in Australia, or 07/3268 6333. Fax 07/3268 6299. www.tangalooma.com. 288 units (all with shower only). A$250–A$280 (US$200–US$224) double; A$280–A$340 (US$224–US$272) double for 1-bedroom apt (sleeps 5); A$460–A$560 (US$368–US$448) villa for up to 8. Children 3–14 sharing with parent A$20 (US$16). Rates include dolphin feeding. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; cafe; 2 outdoor pools; driving range; putting green; tennis and squash courts; archery; Jacuzzi; watersports equipment rental; children's programs; playground; tour desk; 4WD rental; babysitting; coin-op laundry. *In room:* A/C (in some), TV, kitchen (in villas), kitchenette (in some), minibar, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer (in some).

## OTHER MORETON BAY ISLANDS

**THE BAY ISLANDS** Four small islands in Moreton Bay are known collectively as the Bay Islands. They are Russell, Lamb, Macleay, and Karragarra islands, clustered in the calm passage between the mainland and North Stradbroke at the southern end of Moreton Bay. They are perfect for day-tripping, and the **Bay Islands water taxi service** (✆ **07/3206 8033** or 07/3409 1145) from Redland Bay takes 10 to 20 minutes. It's A$10 (US$8) round-trip, and A$1.20 (US95¢) to island-hop between each.

**ST. HELENA ISLAND** For 65 years, from 1867 to 1932, St. Helena was a prison island, known as "the hellhole of the Pacific" to the nearly 4,000 souls incarcerated there. Today, the prison ruins are a tourist attraction, with a small museum in the restored and reconstructed deputy superintendent's cottage. Admission to the island—now a national park—is by guided tour only. Excellent tours, most involving a re-enactment of life on the island jail, are run by **AB Sea Cruises** (✆ **07/3893 1240;** Mon–Sat 8:30am–4:30pm) on the launch *Cat-o-Nine-Tails,* leaving from Manly Boat Harbour. The cost is A$69 (US$55) adults, A$59 (US$47) seniors and students, A$39 (US$31) children 4 to 14. The tour leaves at 9:15am weekdays, returning at 2:15pm; on weekends and public holidays, it leaves at 11am and returns at 4pm. The price includes a box lunch. **St. Helena By Night Ghost Tours** run from Manly Boat Harbour on some Friday and Saturday nights. They include dinner, a dramatized version of life in the prison, and a few spooky surprises. Night tours leave at 7pm and return at 11:15pm; the cost A$79 (US$63) adults, A$74 (US$59) seniors and students, and A$44 (US$35) children. Reservations are essential.

To reach Manly Boat Harbour from Brisbane, take the train from Central Station to Manly (A$3.20/US$2.55) and walk about 100m (328 ft.). The trip takes about 50 minutes.

**COOCHIEMUDLO ISLAND** British explorer Matthew Flinders landed here in 1799, and this event is re-enacted each July. "Coochie" is small enough to walk or cycle around, and is a great place for watersports along the 3.5km (2 miles) of beaches—windsurfing, sailing, swimming, and paddle-skiing are available. There are a 9-hole golf course, a tennis court, licensed cafe, galleries, and accommodations. Camping is not allowed. **The Bay Islands taxi service** (✆ **07/3409 1145**) leaves from the Victoria Point jetty (Colburn Ave.) and Cleveland. The trip takes about 5 minutes from Victoria Point and costs A$2.80 (US$2.25) each way. From Cleveland, it takes about 20 minutes and costs A$9 (US$7.20) round-trip.

7

# Queensland & the Great Barrier Reef

*by Lee Mylne*

With a landscape three times the size of Texas and a population that hugs the coast but embraces the Outback, Queensland is a treasure trove of stunning scenery, fantastic yarns, and eccentric personalities. Its most famous attraction is the Great Barrier Reef . . . hardly the only thing worth seeing. Great beaches, tropical weather, and the mystique of the Outback make "where to go" one of the most difficult decisions.

White sandy beaches grace almost the entire coast, and just offshore are a string of the beautiful islands and coral atolls. At the southern end, just north of the New South Wales border, travelers head for the Gold Coast beaches and theme parks. In the north, from Townsville to Cape York, the rainforest teems with unique flora and fauna.

The fertile coastal fringe and tropical climate is perfect for cultivating such fruits as bananas and pineapples, and the warm, wet coastline hosts enough sugarcane fields that the area produces a significant amount of the world's sugar.

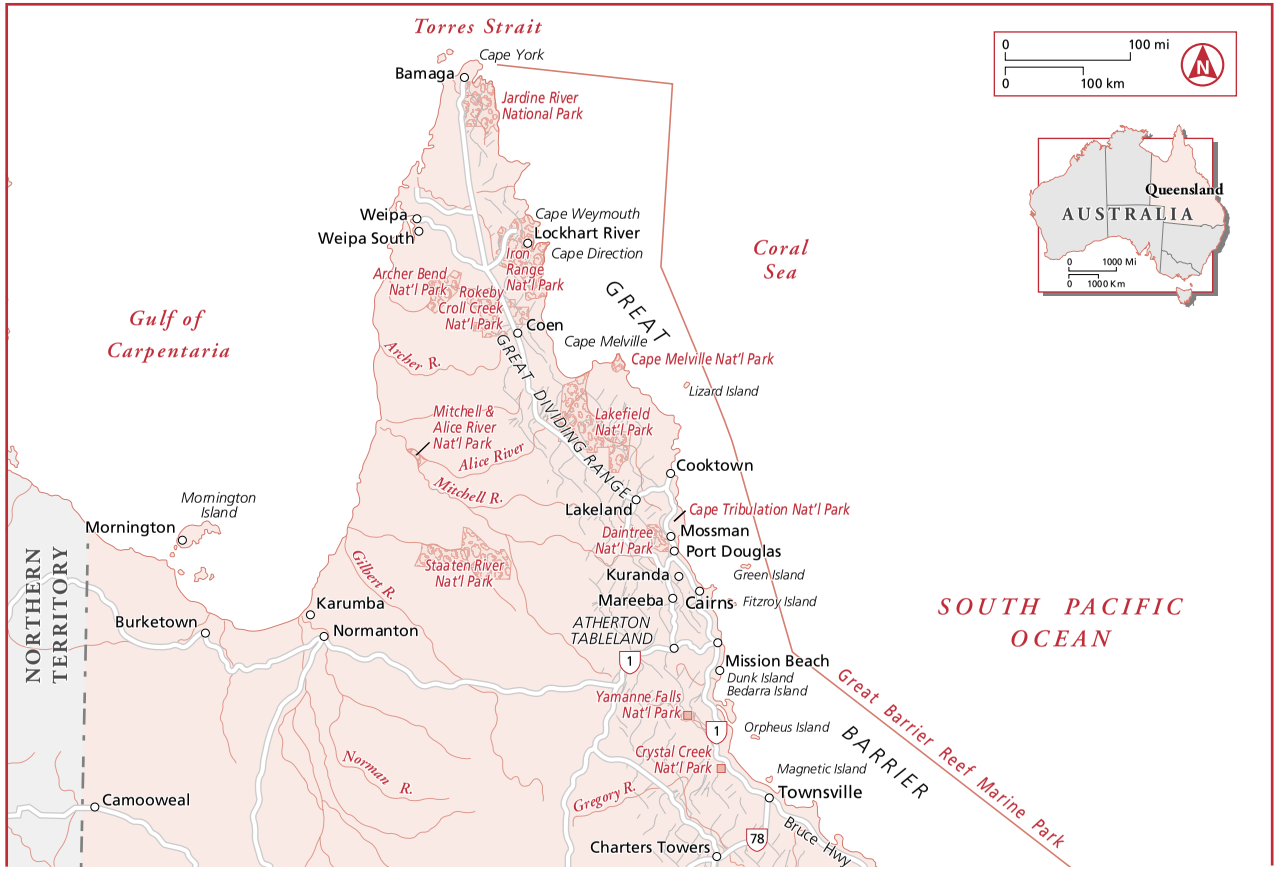
Brisbane is the state's amenable capital (see chapter 6). Less than an hour's drive south is the Gold Coast "glitter strip," with its 35km (22 miles) of surf and sandy beaches. To the north of Brisbane lies the Sunshine Coast—more white beaches, crystal-clear waters, and rolling green mountains dotted with villages.

Further north is the Fraser Coast and South Burnett. Maryborough will fascinate history buffs, with its original Queenslander homes and reminders of yesteryear. The majestic pines of the Bunya Mountains provide a lush backdrop for the South Burnett Valley, an area rich in history, agriculture, wineries, and country towns.

No one should miss the stunning wild beauty of the largest sand island in the world, World Heritage–listed Fraser Island. Each year from August to October, humpback whales come to frolic in the sheltered waters between Fraser Island and Hervey Bay.

Inland, the gold, peanut, beef, wine, and emu country offers another insight into Queensland country life. Inland are rich farming areas and the gem-field towns of Sapphire, Emerald, Rubyvale, and Anakie, which attract modern-day miners keen to seek their fortune—beautiful gems can still be unearthed by lucky fossickers.

The Town of 1770 marks the spot where Captain James Cook and his crew came ashore from the *Endeavour* in 1770. The clear waters and pristine coastline have changed little since then. Nearby Gladstone boasts many industries as well as a large yachting marina and good seafood restaurants. Gladstone is the gateway to Heron Island, an idyllic coral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Cape Weymouth
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Rokeby
Croll Creek Nat'l Park
Coen
Cape Melville
Cape Melville Nat'l Park
Lizard Island
Gulf of Carpentaria
Coral Sea
GREAT DIVIDING RANGE
Archer R.
Mitchell & Alice River Nat'l Park
Alice River
Mitchell R.
Lakefield Nat'l Park
Cooktown
Lakeland
Cape Tribulation Nat'l Park
Daintree Nat'l Park
Mossman
Port Douglas
Kuranda
Green Island
Cairns
Fitzroy Island
Mareeba
ATHERTON TABLELAND
Mornington Island
Mornington
NORTHERN TERRITORY
Gilbert R.
Staaten River Nat'l Park
Karumba
Burketown
Normanton
Mission Beach
Dunk Island
Bedarra Island
Yamanne Falls Nat'l Park
Orpheus Island
Crystal Creek Nat'l Park
Magnetic Island
Townsville
Great Barrier Reef Marine Park
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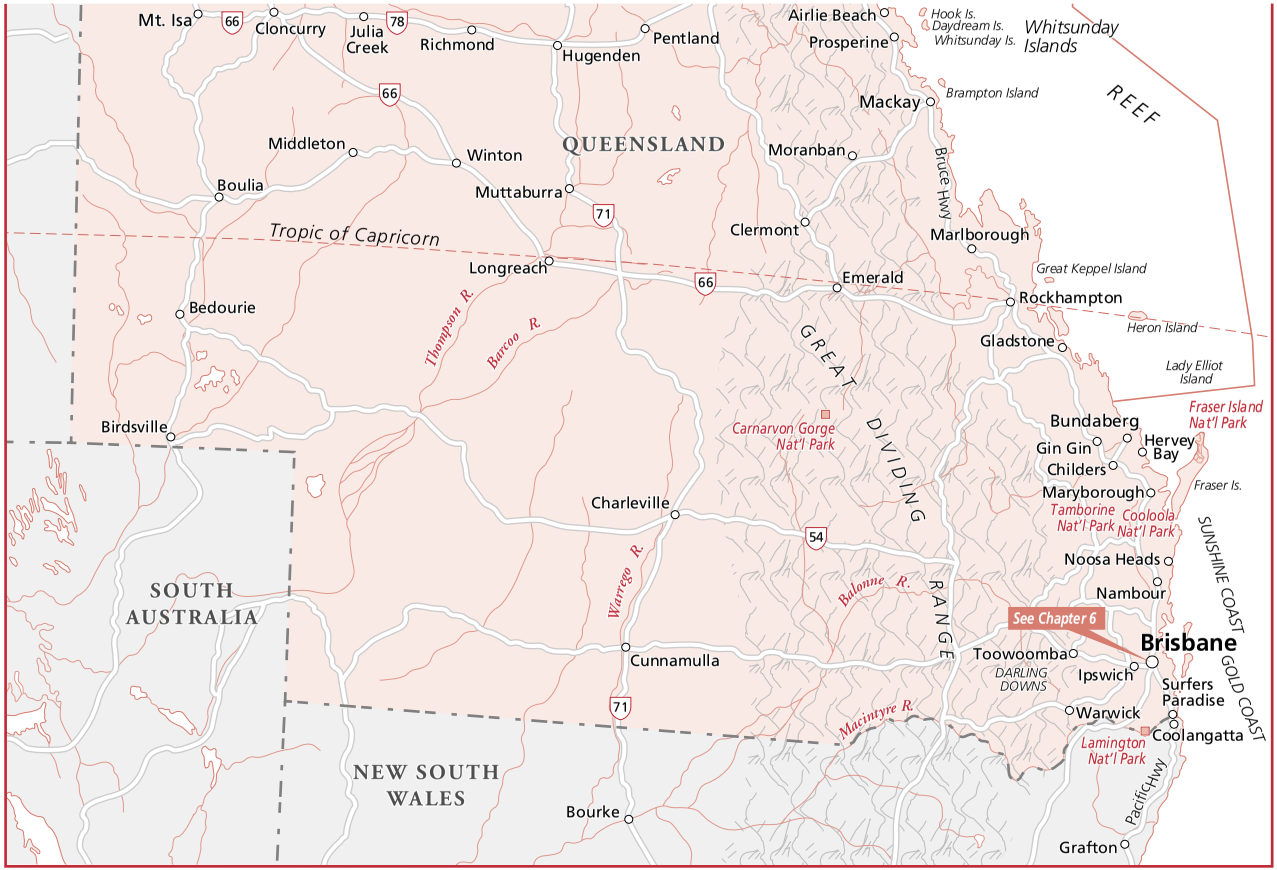
Mt. Isa
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Cloncurry
Julia Creek
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Richmond
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Pentland
Airlie Beach
Prosperine
Hook Is.
Daydream Is.
Whitsunday Is.
Whitsunday Islands
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Brampton Island
REEF
Middleton
Winton
QUEENSLAND
Moranbah
Bruce Hwy
Boulia
Muttaburra
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Longreach
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Emerald
Great Keppel Island
Rockhampton
Bedourie
Thompson R.
Barcoo R.
GREAT DIVIDING RANGE
Heron Island
Gladstone
Lady Elliot Island
Fraser Island Nat'l Park
Birdsville
Carnarvon Gorge Nat'l Park
Bundaberg
Hervey Bay
Gin Gin
Childers
Fraser Is.
Maryborough
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Cooloola Nat'l Park
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SUNSHINE COAST
GOLD COAST
Noosa Heads
Warrego R.
Balonne R.
Nambour
SOUTH AUSTRALIA
See Chapter 6
Brisbane
Toowoomba
Cunnamulla
DARLING DOWNS
Ipswich
Surfers Paradise
71
Macintyre R.
Warwick
Coolangatta
Lamington Nat'l Park
NEW SOUTH WALES
Pacific Hwy
Bourke
Grafton

cay, where you'll find a turtle rookery and other wildlife.

Around Rockhampton, the beef capital of Australia, more than three million cattle roam among the gum trees, and at local pubs, steak sandwiches and barbecued *snags* (sausages) are always on the *plat du jour.* Throughout the region, the wonders of the Great Barrier Reef are within easy reach.

Traveling north along the coast, you will be drawn along by one tropical island after another until you get to the 74 islands of the Whitsunday and Cumberland groups.

Then you will enter a land where tropical islands, rainforest, rugged mountains, and romantic rivers unite. Green sugarcane fields are everywhere—Mackay is the largest sugar-producing region in Australia. This attractive city has its own beach, and the harbor is a departure point for cruises to the Great Barrier Reef and the Whitsunday islands. The Whitsundays are on the same latitude as Tahiti, and for my money are equally lovely. The island playground is laced with coral reefs rising out of calm, blue waters teeming with colorful coral and fish, and it's warm enough for swimming all year round.

North of the Whitsundays is popular Dunk Island and the rainforest settlement of Mission Beach. The delights of the tropics are apparent everywhere in this area of Tropical North Queensland. From islands dotted with palm trees to Wet Tropics Rainforest, the region is populated with friendly, laid-back people. The port city of Townsville boasts 320 days of sunshine per year and marks the start of the Great Green Way—an area of great natural beauty leading to Cairns. The trip could take anywhere from 4 hours to 14 days depending on how many detours you wish to make.

Farther north, you come to Cairns, with rainforest hills and villages to explore and a harbor full of cruise and dive boats waiting to take you to the reef. Cairns is fine as a base, but many savvy travelers head an hour north to the village of Port Douglas, preferring its peaceful rural atmosphere, uncrowded beach, and less developed environs.

A visit to Queensland would not be complete without at least one trip into the Outback. You can head west from Rockhampton, to discover the heart of Queensland at Longreach, Barcaldine, and Winton, or from Townsville to the mining town of Mt. Isa. From Cairns, the Gulf Savannah region is rich in welcoming small towns.

It's possible to spend a small fortune on watersports, sailing trips, cruises, gamefishing excursions, and rainforest 4WD tours in Queensland, but this chapter will help you scout out the best deals. Cheap accommodations and food are generally plentiful, and the sunshine and beaches are always free.

## EXPLORING THE QUEENSLAND COAST

Without a doubt your itinerary will include at least one trip to the Great Barrier Reef. The reef starts around Bundaberg and runs up the Queensland coast to New Guinea, so you have lots of departure points from which to explore. Don't think you have to go through Cairns or Port Douglas; the reef is as accessible and magnificent from the Whitsundays, Townsville, Gladstone, and Bundaberg. Cairns has the advantage of good flight connections from Melbourne, Sydney, and Brisbane.

**VISITOR INFORMATION** The **Queensland Travel Centre** is a great resource on traveling and touring the state, including the Great Barrier Reef. Visit the Destination Queensland website at www.destinationqueensland.com or call ✆ **13 88 33**

in Australia. Tourism Queensland has offices in the United States and the United Kingdom—see "Visitor Information" in chapter 2.

You will also find excellent information on the **Great Barrier Reef Visitors Bureau's** website at www.great-barrier-reef.com. This is not an official tourist office but part of a private company, **Travel Online** (✆ **07/3876 4644;** fax 07/3876 4645), which offers itinerary planning and booking services for a wide range of accommodations and tours throughout north Queensland.

For information on B&Bs and farm-stays in Cairns, Port Douglas, Mission Beach, and Townsville, contact the **Bed & Breakfast and Farmstay Association of Far North Queensland,** P.O. Box 595, Ravenshoe, QLD 4888 (✆ **07/4097 7022;** www.bnbnq.com.au).

**WHEN TO GO** Australia's winter (June–Aug) is high season in Queensland as shivering southerners from Sydney and Melbourne head north to the sun. Summer is hot and sticky across most of the state and in Brisbane. From the Whitsundays northward,

## Cheap Thrills: What to See & Do for Free (or Almost) in Queensland

- **Breathing in the sea air on a stroll along The Esplanade in Cairns.** Watch the cruise boats pull in during the late afternoon, and at night join the throngs of people enjoying a cheap feed at the hordes of fish-and-chips shops, hamburger joints, and pizzerias lining the strip.
- **Strolling the Flecker Botanic Gardens.** Located 3km (1¾ miles) northwest of Cairns, the walking tracks, gardens, ferns, wetlands, and orchids are blissful in the summer heat and relaxing anytime.
- **Exploring the Wet Tropics rainforests at Mission Beach.** The Daintree Rainforest north of Cairns is best explored on a commercial 4WD safari, but the even denser Wet Tropics rainforests at Mission Beach, a 90-minute drive south of Cairns, can be explored on foot for nothing. You may even spot a cassowary, a giant ostrichlike bird with a blue horny head like a dinosaur!
- **Hitting the beach!** Beaches are always free in Oz, and Queensland has hundreds of them. Park your towel on any of Cairns's pretty palm-lined crescents, such as Palm Cove or Trinity Beach, or head south to the almost deserted, incandescently beautiful Mission Beach, which is bordered by thick jungle and has magical views across to Dunk Island.
- **Checking out a koala colony.** You don't have to pay admission to a wildlife park to see koalas. Likely spots to find them in the wild include Noosa National Park, just a stroll from the main shopping strip on Hastings Street in Noosa Heads. Say hello to the koalas, then carry on around the headland along the park's network of trails. Park admission is free.
- **Feeding the birds at O'Reilly's Rainforest Guesthouse in the Gold Coast hinterland.** Brilliant black-and-gold regent bowerbirds, crimson-and-cobalt rosellas, and a flurry of other wild birds wait to be fed every morning. You will gasp with delight when they land on your hands to eat.

## Follow the Heritage Trails

**Queensland's Heritage Trails Network** (✆ **1800/222 689** in Australia; www.queensland-holidays.com.au/qhtn) links 43 heritage experiences for visitors keen to get behind the tourist traps and learn about Queensland's history, culture, and natural wonders. It's a network that celebrates indigenous communities; pioneering feats; pastoral, mining, wool, and railway industries; ancient dinosaur relics; and Aboriginal legends of the night skies.

Journeys along the Queensland Heritage Trails Network can start from any part of Queensland, and all are accessible on sealed roads.

Attractions are identified by signs, and Heritage Gateways in Cairns (at the Tourist Information Centre on the Esplanade) and Maryborough (in the historic Custom's House) offer information on other network attractions within the region.

A series of walking trails in Tropical North Queensland is part of the network. The Wet Tropics Walking Tracks follow in the footsteps of Australia's indigenous people as they trekked from the coast to hinterland, offering the ultimate exploration of the World Heritage Wet Tropics' rainforests and mountains in locations as diverse as Atherton, Tully, Mission Beach, and Kuranda.

Network attractions are linked along major Queensland tourist routes, including the Matilda Highway (Cunnamulla to Karumba in the Gulf of Carpentaria); the Overlander's Way (Townsville to Tennant Creek in the Northern Territory); the Warrego Highway (Ipswich west to Charleville); and the Pacific Coast Touring Route (from Cairns south along the east coast).

winter almost doesn't exist. North Queensland, from around Cairns northward, gets a monsoonal Wet season from December to March or April, with heavy rains and cyclones. You can visit the Great Barrier Reef during the Wet without a problem, but swollen creeks and floodwaters sometimes cut off parts of the Daintree Rainforest. If you want to visit north Queensland between January and April, try heading a little farther south to the beautiful Whitsundays, which are generally beyond the reach of the rains (although not beyond the reach of cyclones).

**GETTING AROUND** **By Car** The Bruce Highway runs along the coast from Brisbane to Cairns. It is mostly a two-lane highway, and the scenery is pretty much eucalyptus bushland, but from Mackay north you will pass through sugarcane fields.

**Tourism Queensland** publishes regional motoring guides. All you are likely to need, however, is a state map from the **Royal Automobile Club of Queensland (RACQ),** 300 St. Pauls Terrace, Fortitude Valley, Brisbane, QLD 4006 (✆ **13 19 05** in Australia, or 07/3872-8429). In Brisbane, you can get maps and advice from the RACQ office in the General Post Office (GPO) at 261 Queen St. For road condition reports, call ✆ **1300/130 595** (recorded message) or 07/3361 2406. The state's **Department of Natural Resources and Mines** (✆ **07/3896 3216;** www.nrm.qld.gov.au) publishes an excellent range of "Sunmap" maps that highlight tourist attractions, national parks, and the like,

although they are of limited use as road maps. You can pick these up at newsdealers and gas stations throughout the state.

**By Bus** **Greyhound Australia** (✆ **13 14 99** in Australia, or 07/4690 9950) makes the trip from Brisbane to Cairns in about 28 hours, stopping at most towns along the route. See chapter 2 for more details on getting around by bus.

**By Train** Queensland Rail's **Traveltrain** (✆ **13 22 32** in Australia, or 07/3235 1122; www.traveltrain.com.au) operates two long-distance trains along the Brisbane-Cairns route, a 32-hour trip aboard ***The Sunlander*** or about 8 hours less on the high-speed ***Tilt Train.*** Traveltrain also operates trains to Outback towns. See the "Getting Around Australia" section in chapter 2 for more details.

**By Plane** This is the fastest way to see a lot in such a big state. **Qantas** (✆ **13 13 13** in Australia, or 800/227-4500 in the U.S. and Canada; www.qantas.com.au) and its regional subsidiary **QantasLink** serve most coastal towns from Brisbane, and a few from Cairns. **Virgin Blue** (✆ **13 67 89** in Australia, or 07/3295 2296; www.virginblue.com.au) services Brisbane, Cairns, Townsville, Mackay, Proserpine on the Whitsunday coast, Rockhampton, Hervey Bay, the Gold Coast, and Maroochydore on the Sunshine Coast.

## 1 Exploring the Great Barrier Reef

It's the only living structure on Earth visible from the moon; at 348,700 sq. km (238,899 sq. miles), it's bigger than many countries. It's more than 2,000km (1,250 miles) long, stretching from Lady Elliot Island off Bundaberg to just south of Papua New Guinea. It's home to over a thousand species of fish, hundreds of varieties of corals, thousands of kinds of shellfish, and uncountable sponges, worms, starfish, and sea urchins. The Great Barrier Reef is the Eighth Wonder of the World. It is a World Heritage Site and is the biggest Marine Park in the world.

### INTRODUCING THE GREAT BARRIER REEF

A reef is not a plant, but a conglomeration of tiny animals called coral polyps. They coat themselves in limestone to keep safe, and as they die, the limestone bodies cement into a foundation on which more coral grows. And so it goes, the endless building of a megametropolis of coral polyp skyscrapers just under the surface of the water.

You will see three kinds of reef on the Great Barrier Reef—fringing, ribbon, and platform (or patch). Fringing reefs are the stuff just off the shore of islands and along the mainland. Ribbon reefs create long streamers of coral along the outer edge of the Great Barrier Reef and are found north of Cairns. Platform reefs are splotches of coral emerging from the continental shelf along the Queensland coast. Platform reefs are the most common and what most people think of when they refer to the Great Barrier Reef. Island resorts in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park are either "continental," meaning they are essentially part of the Australian landmass, or "cays," crushed dead coral and sand amassed over time by water action. Dazzling coral and fish life surround cays. Continental islands may have terrific coral, some coral, or none at all.

Along with dazzling fish, the Reef is home to large numbers of green and loggerhead turtles, one of the biggest dugong populations in the world, sharks, giant manta rays, and sea snakes. In winter (July–Sept) humpback whales gather in the warm waters around the Hervey Bay and the Whitsunday islands to calve.

You can snorkel, scuba dive, fish (recreational fishing is permitted in most zones of the Reef), or fly over the Reef. The "Outer Reef," the network of platform and ribbon reefs that lies an average of 65km (41 miles) off the coast (about 1 hr. to 90 min. by boat from the mainland) is what most people are referring to when they talk about the Great Barrier Reef. You should get out and see that, but there is plenty of fringing reef to explore around the islands closer to the mainland.

Learning about the Reef before you get there will enhance your visit. **Reef Teach** ★ (✆ **07/4031 7794**) is an evening slide show and talk by Paddy Colwell, a marine biologist and diver. He shares much valuable information and history about the Reef: how it was formed, how coral grows, what dangerous creatures to avoid, and how to take successful underwater photos. The presentation takes place throughout the year at 14 Spence St., Cairns, Monday through Saturday from 6:15 to 8:30pm, and costs A$13 (US$10) adults and A$6 (US$4.80) children under 14.

Townsville is the headquarters of the **Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority,** and a visit to its showcase, **Reef HQ** ★ (see "The North Coast: Mission Beach, Townsville & the Islands" later in the chapter), is a superb introduction. The star attraction at the aquarium is a living reef ecosystem in a massive viewing tank. For more information, write the Authority at P.O. Box 1379, Townsville, QLD 4810 (✆ **07/4750 0700;** fax 07/4772 6093; www.gbrmpa.gov.au or www.reefhq.com.au).

## EXPLORING THE REEF

**Snorkeling** ★ the Reef can be a wondrous experience. Green and purple clams, pink sponges, red starfish, purple sea urchins, and fish from electric blue to neon yellow to lime are a truly magical sight. Coral's rich colors only survive with lots of light, so the nearer the surface the brighter and richer the marine life. That means snorkelers bobbing about on top of the Reef are in a prime position to see it at its best.

If your Reef cruise offers a **guided snorkel tour,** often called a "snorkel safari," take it. They are worth the extra cost of A$30 (US$24) or so. Most safaris are suitable for both beginners and advanced snorkelers, and are led by marine biologists. They will tell you heaps about the fascinating sea creatures before you. Snorkeling is easy to master, and the crew on cruise boats is always happy to tutor you.

A day trip to the Reef also offers you a great opportunity to go diving—even if you have never dived before. Every major cruise boat listed in "Day Trips to the Reef" (see below) and many dedicated dive boats listed in "Diving the Reef" (later in this chapter) offer introductory sessions that allow you to dive without certification to a depth of 6m (20 ft.) in the company of an instructor. You will need to complete a medical questionnaire on board and then undergo a 30-minute briefing on the boat. Intro dives are also referred to as "resort dives" because many resorts offer something similar, giving you 1 or 2 hours' instruction in their pools before taking you to a nearby reef to dive.

### *Tips* When to Visit the Reef

April to November is the best time. December to March can be uncomfortably hot and humid, particularly as far north as the Whitsundays, Cairns, and Port Douglas. In the winter months (June–Aug), the water can be a touch chilly (Aussies think so, anyway), but it rarely drops below 72° F (22° C).

Torres Strait
Cape York
Submerged Reefs
0 100 mi
0 100 km
N
Great Barrier Reef
AUSTRALIA
Sydney
Canberra
0 1000 Mi
0 1000 Km
Weipa
PACIFIC OCEAN
Coral Sea
Lizard Is.
GREAT BARRIER REEF
Cooktown
Daintree Natonial Park
Green Is.
Port Douglas
Cairns
Fitzroy Is.
Mission Beach
Tully
Dunk Is.
Bedarra Is.
Cardwell
Orpheus Is.
Magnetic Is.
Townsville
Ayr
MARINE PARK
Charters Towers
Airlie Beach
Proserpine
Whitsunday Islands
Flinders Hwy
78
GREAT DIVIDING RANGE
Mackay
Bruce Hwy.
Yeppoon
Great Keppel Is.
Tropic of Capricorn
Longreach
Landsborough Hwy.
66
Rockhampton
Heron Is.
Gladstone
Lady Elliot Is.
QUEENSLAND
Bundaberg
Fraser Is.
Hervey Bay
Maryborough
Noosa Sunshine Coast
Charleville
54
Caloundra
Dalby
Brisbane
71
Ipswich
Toowoomba
Gold Coast
Surfers Paradise
Lamington Natonial Park
Coolangatta

### Tips Reef Safety Warnings

Coral is very sharp and coral cuts get infected quickly. If you cut yourself, ask cruise boat staff for antiseptic cream and apply it right away.

The sun and reflected light off the water will burn you fast. Put sunscreen on your back and the back of your legs, especially around your knees and the back of your neck, even behind your ears, places that will be exposed as you swim face down. Apply more when you leave the water.

The Great Barrier Reef is a Marine Park. Removing coral (living or dead), shells, or any other natural item is an offense, not to mention offensive!

## CHOOSING A GATEWAY TO THE REEF

Travelers' lore has it that Cairns and Port Douglas are the best places from which to access the Reef. They are both great jumping-off points, but the quality of the coral is just as good off any town along the coast between Gladstone and Cairns. The Reef is pretty much equidistant from any point on the coast—about 90 minutes away by high-speed catamaran. An exception is Townsville, where the Reef is about 2½ hours away. Think carefully about where you would like to base yourself.

The main gateways, north to south, are **Port Douglas, Cairns, Mission Beach, Townsville,** the **Whitsunday islands, Gladstone** (for Heron Island), and **Bundaberg.** The Whitsundays have the added attractions of being dazzling islands; having resorts offering watersports and other activities; and offering a large array of diving, fishing, and day cruises. You can snorkel every day off your island or join a sailing or cruise day trip to a number of magnificent inner reefs much nearer than the main Outer Reef. Many people stay in Cairns because of easy airport access.

If you are a nonswimmer, choose a Reef cruise that visits a coral cay because a cay slopes gradually into shallow water and the surrounding coral. The Low Isles at Port Douglas; Green Island, Michaelmas Cay, or Upolu Cay off Cairns; Beaver Cay off Mission Beach; and Heron Island are all good locations.

## DAY TRIPS TO THE REEF

The most common way to get to the Reef is on one of the big motorized catamarans that carry up to 300 passengers and depart from Cairns, Port Douglas, Townsville, Mission Beach, and the Whitsunday mainland and islands. The boats are air-conditioned and have a bar, videos, and educational material on board, as well as a biologist who gives a talk on the Reef's ecology. The boats tie up at their own private pontoons anchored to a platform reef. The pontoons have glass-bottom boats for folks who don't want to get wet, dry underwater viewing platforms, usually a bar, sun decks, shaded seats, and often showers.

An alternative to traveling on a big tour boat is to go on one of the multitude of smaller boats. These typically visit two or three Reef sites rather than just one. There are usually no more than 20 passengers, so the crew offers you personal attention, and you and the other passengers can have a fun, friendly time. Another bonus of going in a small boat is that you will have the coral pretty much all to yourself. The drawbacks are that you have only the cramped deck to sit on when you get out of the water, and your traveling time to the Reef may be longer. If you're a nervous snorkeler, you may feel safer going in a big boat and surrounded by 300 other passengers in the water.

Most day-trip fares include snorkel gear—fins, mask, and snorkel, and wet suits in winter, although you rarely need them—free use of the underwater viewing chambers and glass-bottom boat rides, a buffet or barbecue lunch, and morning and afternoon refreshments. Most of the big boat operators and many of the smaller boats offer introductory dives for novices and regular dives for certified divers. Diving is optional and costs extra. The big boats post snorkeling scouts to keep a lookout for anyone in trouble and to count heads. If you wear glasses, check whether your boat offers prescription masks as this could make a big difference to the quality of your experience! You can also travel as a snorkel-only passenger on most dive boats, too.

The major launching points for day trips to the Reef follow, listed north to south.

### FROM PORT DOUGLAS

The most glamorous large vessels visiting the Outer Reef are **Quicksilver Connections' Wavepiercer catamarans** ★ (✆ **07/4099 5500;** www.quicksilver-cruises.com) based in Port Douglas. These ultra-sleek high-speed, air-conditioned 37m (121-ft.) and 46m (149-ft.) catamarans carry 300 or 440 passengers to Agincourt Reef, a ribbon reef 39 nautical miles (72km/43 miles) from shore on the very outer edge of the Reef. After the 90-minute trip to the Reef, you tie up at a two-story pontoon, where you spend 3½ hours on the Reef.

The catamarans depart Marina Mirage at 10am daily except December 25. The cost for the day is A$180 (US$144) for adults and A$93 (US$74) for kids 4 to 14. Guided snorkel safaris cost A$55 (US$44) per person, and introductory dives cost A$125 (US$100) per person. Qualified divers take a dive-tender boat to make one dive for A$87 (US$70) or two dives for A$129 (US$103) per person, all gear included. Because Quicksilver carries so many passengers, booking snorkel safaris and dives in advance is a good idea.

The dive boat ***Poseidon*** (see "Diving the Reef," below) welcomes snorkelers. It presents a Reef ecology talk en route and takes you on a guided snorkel safari. The price of A$145 (US$116) for adults and A$110 (US$88) for children 3 to 12 includes lunch and transfers from Port Douglas hotels.

Port Douglas also offers easy day-trip access to the Low Isles, two pretty coral-wrapped cays close to shore on the Inner Reef. See the "Port Douglas, Daintree & the Cape Tribulation Area" section later in this chapter.

### FROM CAIRNS

Cairns passengers can board the most luxurious vessel visiting the Reef, **Quicksilver Connections'** Wavepiercer catamaran (✆ **07/4087 2100;** www.quicksilver-cruises.com). It departs from the Reef Fleet Terminal at 8am and from Palm Cove Jetty on Cairns's northern beaches at 8:30am. It arrives at Port Douglas at 9:30am and leaves for the Reef at 10am. All of these trips run daily except on December 25. For the whole day from Cairns or Palm Cove, passengers pay A$190 (US$152) for adults, A$98 (US$78) for kids 4 to 14. The price includes hotel pickup.

**Tips Feeling Green?**

If you are inclined to be seasick, come prepared with medication. Some boats sell a ginger-based natural anti-seasickness pill, but it doesn't always work!

If you prefer to visit the Reef straight from Cairns, large-scale operator **Great Adventures** (✆ **1800/079 080** in Australia, or 07/4044 9944; www.greatadventures.com.au) does daily cruises in fast, air-conditioned catamarans to a three-level pontoon on the Outer Reef. The pontoon has a children's swimming area, a semi-submersible, and an underwater observatory. You get at least 3 hours on the Reef. The cost for the day is A$162 (US$130) for adults, A$84 (US$67) for children 4 to 14, and A$414 (US$331) for families. Hotel transfers are available from Cairns, the northern beaches and Port Douglas for an extra cost. The boat departs the Great Adventures terminal at the Reef Fleet Terminal at 10:30am.

Guided snorkel tours are A$30 (US$24) per person extra. Introductory dives cost A$125 (US$100) per person extra, while certified divers pay A$80 (US$65) for one dive or A$125 (US$100) for two dives, with all gear.

You can also depart Cairns with Great Adventures at 8:30am and spend 2 hours on Green Island en route. This cruise costs an extra A$20 (US$16) per adult and A$10 (US$8) per child between 4 and 14, or A$50 (US$40) extra per family.

**Sunlover Cruises** (✆ **1800/810 512** in Australia, or 07/4050 1333; www.sunlover.com.au) has a choice of Outer Reef trips aboard its large, fast catamarans. One trip stops at Fitzroy Island briefly before heading to Moore Reef on the Outer Reef. The day costs A$187 (US$150) for adults, A$98 (US$78) for children 4 to 14, and A$480 (US$384) for families of four, including transfers from city and northern beaches hotels. This trip includes a glass-bottom boat ride and semi-submersible viewing.

Another Sunlover trip departs Cairns and picks up passengers at Palm Cove before heading to Arlington Reef. The price from Cairns is A$150 (US$120) for adults, A$79 (US$63) for kids 4 to 14, and A$387 (US$310) for families, including hotel pickups.

On both trips, you spend about 4 hours on the Reef. Introductory dives on either trip cost A$109 (US$87). Certified divers pay the same price, including all gear. Both cruises include lunch and transfers from Cairns and northern beaches hotels. Both boats depart from the Reef Fleet Terminal in Cairns at 10am daily.

An alternative to motoring to the Reef is to sail to it. **Ocean Spirit Cruises** (✆ **1800/644 227** in Australia, or 07/4031 2920; www.oceanspirit.com.au) operates two sailing cats that take no more than 150 passengers to Michaelmas Cay or Upolu Cay, white-sand cays on the Outer Reef surrounded by rich reefs. This trip is a good value; it includes a pleasant 2-hour sail to either cay, a guided snorkeling safari, a guided beach walk, and a glass of bubbly and live music on the way home—in addition to the usual reef-ecology talks, semi-submersible rides, lunch, and transfers from your Cairns or northern beaches hotel. Another plus is that you spend your out-of-water time on a beautiful beach, not on a pontoon or boat deck. You get about 4 hours on the Reef.

The day trip to Michaelmas Cay is A$169 (US$135) for adults, A$88 (US$70) for children 4 to 14, including transfers from Cairns (from Port Douglas they are A$39/US$31 per person extra). The day trip to Upolu Cay costs A$99 (US$79) for adults, A$76 (US$61) for kids. Transfers from Cairns and the northern beaches are A$12 (US$9.60) per person, and from Port Douglas they cost an extra A$39 (US$31) per person. Introductory dives cost A$95 (US$76), and certified divers pay A$65 (US$52) for one dive or A$110 (US$88) for two dives, all gear included, at Michaelmas Cay, less at Upolu. The boats depart Reef Fleet Terminal at 8:30am daily.

### FROM MISSION BEACH

Mission Beach is the closest point on the mainland to the Reef, just 1 hour by the high-speed **Quick Cat Cruises** catamaran (✆ **1800/654 242** in Australia, or 07/4068 7289). The trip starts with an hour at Dunk Island, 20 minutes offshore, where you can walk rainforest trails, play on the beach, or parasail or jet-ski for an extra fee. Then it's a 1-hour trip to sandy Beaver Cay on the Outer Reef, where you have 3 hours to snorkel or to check out the coral from a glass-bottom boat. There's no shade on the cay, so come prepared with a hat and sunscreen. The trip departs daily from Clump Point Jetty at 9:30am. It costs A$140 (US$112) for adults, A$70 (US$56) for children 4 to 14, and A$350 (US$280) for families of four. Sunday and Wednesday specials cost as little as A$88 (US$70). An introductory scuba dive costs A$80 (US$64) for the first dive and A$35 (US$28) for the second. You should prebook your introductory scuba dive to ensure a place. Qualified divers pay A$60 (US$48) for the first dive, A$35 (US$28) for the second, all gear included. Free pickups from Mission Beach are included. You can also join this trip from Cairns; coach connections from your Cairns or northern beaches hotel will cost extra.

### FROM TOWNSVILLE

Most boats visiting the Reef from Townsville are live-aboard vessels that make trips of 2 or more days, designed for serious divers. **Barrier Reef Dive, Cruise & Travel** (✆ **1800/636 778** in Australia, or 07/4772 5800; www.divecruisetravel.com) runs day trips to Keeper Reef and John Brewer Reef. It takes only 1½ hours to reach John Brewer Reef, where you can make introductory dives for A$70 (US$56) for the first and A$35 (US$28) for the second, and certified divers can make two dives for A$70 (US$56); all gear included. The cruise costs A$139 (US$111) for adults, A$109 (US$87) for seniors, A$74 (US$59) for children 5 to 15, and A$352 (US$282) for families of four. The price includes lunch, and morning and afternoon tea. There are freshwater showers on board. Cruises depart Townsville at 8:30am, with a pickup at Magnetic Island, and return by about 5pm. Several other operators, including **Adrenalin Dive** (✆ **07/4724 0600**), have trips to the *Yongala* wreck, the Coral Sea, and the Reef.

### FROM THE WHITSUNDAYS

**Fantasea Cruises** (✆ **07/4946 5111;** www.fantasea.com.au) makes a daily trip to Hardy Reef from Shute Harbour, near Airlie Beach, in a high-speed, air-conditioned catamaran. The boat has a bar, and a biologist gives a marine-ecology talk en route. You anchor at the massive Fantasea Reefworld pontoon, which holds up to 600 people, and spend up to 3½ hours on the Reef. The day trip costs A$161 (US$129) for adults, A$138 (US$110) for seniors and students, A$87 (US$70) for children 4 to 14, and A$379 (US$303) for families of four. Guided snorkel safaris cost A$20 (US$16) extra. Cruise-dive packages are available for A$82 (US$66) extra for both introductory and certified dives. Cruises depart at 8am and pick up passengers at South Molle, Daydream, and Hamilton island resorts. Passengers from Long and Lindeman islands connect by water taxi.

## MULTIDAY CRUISES ALONG THE REEF

A fun alternative is Fantasea's 2-day, 1-night **ReefSleep,** during which you spend the night on the pontoon. This gives you a chance to snorkel at night when the coral is luminescent and nocturnal sea creatures get busy. The trip includes a marine biologist's slide presentation, two scuba dives, plenty of night snorkeling, two buffet lunches, dinner under the stars with wine, and breakfast and more snorkeling on the

### Tips Budget Snorkeling & Diving

As well as the "big guys" listed here, many smaller operators run cruises to the Reef from Cairns that are usually more affordable. **Down Under Cruise & Dive** (✆ **1800/079 099** in Australia, or 07/4052 8300; fax 07/4031 1373; www.downunderdive.com.au) offers trips aboard its catamaran, *Supercat,* departing from the Reef Fleet Terminal at 8:30am daily. Although its capacity is 200 passengers, the boat carries a maximum of 80. The day trip is A$79 (US$63) per person and includes a free guided snorkel safari and lunch. Introductory dives must be prebooked and cost A$50 (US$40) for one or A$80 (US$64) for two. Certified divers pay A$40 (US$32) for one and A$55 (US$44) for two dives. A wet suit can be rented for A$6 (US$4.80). Return hotel transfers are A$9 (US$7.20) from the city, A$16 (US$13) from the northern beaches.

***Seahorse*** (✆ **07/4041 1919;** www.seahorsedive.com.au), a brand new 20-passenger sailing catamaran, visits Upolu Cay daily for A$89 (US$71) for adults and A$55 (US$44) for children 4 to 14. There's an onboard marine naturalist and guided snorkel safari, and you can rent a wet suit for A$6 (US$4.80) a day. You can even lend a hand sailing if you like. Introductory dives are A$65 (US$52), and a certified dive is A$45 (US$36) with all gear supplied.

***Reef Magic*** (✆ **07/4031 1588;** www.reefmagic.com.au) is a 22m (72-ft.) air-conditioned catamaran that runs from the Reef Fleet Terminal in Cairns daily at 9am to its Marine World platform on the Outer Reef, where you will spend 5 hours. The boat holds 140 people but usually carries between 50 and 80. The price of A$140 (US$112) for adults, A$69 (US$55) for children 4 to 14, and A$350 (US$280) for families of four includes a glass-bottom boat trip. Transfers are available from Cairns for an extra A$7 (US$5.60) per adult and from the northern beaches for an extra A$12 (US$9.60). A guided snorkel tour is A$25 (US$20) per adult or A$15 (US$12) per child. Introductory divers pay A$80 (US$64) for the first dive and A$50 (US$40) for a second; certified divers pay A$80 (US$64) for two dives.

Don't overlook **Green Island,** a stunning coral cay on the Inner Reef 50 minutes east of Cairns, as a Reef destination. It's closer to the mainland, and the snorkeling and diving are every bit as good as on the Outer Reef. Unlike the Outer Reef, where you will most likely be stuck on a pontoon or a boat when you are not in the water, Green Island has beautiful white coral sand beaches to lie on and lush rainforest to stroll in. See the "Cairns" section, below.

second day. You can stay in a clean, comfortable room with four bunk beds for A$343 (US$274) per person, or in the double cabin, which has a king-size bed, for A$404 (US$323) per person. With so few guests per night, you have the Reef all to yourself.

**Down Under Dive** (✆ **1800/079 099** in Australia, or 07/4052 8300; fax 07/4031 1373; www.downunderdive.com.au) in Cairns offers a chance to "sleep on the Reef" aboard a 43m (141-ft.) 1890s-style brigantine, SV *Atlantic Clipper.* It's a sleek, romantic

sailing ship with towering masts; a roomy Jacuzzi on the foredeck; a cocktail bar; a comfortable dining room; and single, double, triple, or quad-share air-conditioned cabins. A motorized launch takes you from Cairns to the ship's reef mooring; from there you sail up to the four popular reef complexes of Norman, Hastings, and Saxon reefs, and Michaelmas Cay. The emphasis is on fun and relaxation, with lots of snorkeling and diving. Choose between a 2-day, 1-night stay in a three- or four-berth cabin for A$250 (US$200) for snorkelers or A$320 (US$256) for divers, and a 3-day, 2-night journey for A$399 (US$319) for snorkelers or A$499 (US$399) for divers. Add A$30 (US$24) per person per night for a twin or double cabin with shower. On a 2-day trip you will fit in up to 6 dives, and on the 3-day trip, up to 10. Prices include all dive and snorkel gear (including prescription masks), meals, and pickup from your Cairns accommodations. Transfers from the Northern Beaches are A$16 (US$13) and from Port Douglas A$36 (US$29) extra return. Reef tax of A$10 (US$8) per person per day (to a maximum of A$30/US$24) applies.

## DIVING THE REEF

Divers have a big choice of dive boats that make 1-day runs to the Outer Reef and live-aboard dive boats making excursions that last up to a week. As a general rule, on a typical 5-hour day trip to the Reef, you will fit in about two dives.

The outfits listed below will give you an idea of the diving trips available and general costs. This is by no means a complete list of operators on the Reef—there are far too many to include here. "The Active Traveler" in chapter 2 has more pointers for locating a dive operator. The prices quoted include full gear rental; knock off about A$20 (US$16) if you have your own gear.

**FROM CAIRNS** **Tusa Dive Charters** (✆ **07/4040 6464;** www.tusadive.com) runs two 24m (72-ft.) dive boats daily to two dive sites from a choice of 21 locations on the Outer Reef. The day costs A$190 (US$152) for divers and A$130 (US$104) for adult or A$80 (US$64) child (ages 4–14) snorkelers, with wet suits, guided snorkel tours, lunch, and transfers from your Cairns or northern beaches hotel. If you want to be shown the best spots under the water, you can take a guided dive for an extra A$20 (US$16). Day trips for introductory divers cost A$195 (US$156) for one dive or A$240 (US$192) for two. The groups are kept to a maximum of 28 people, so you get personal attention. The company is the Nitrox and Rebreather facility for north Queensland, and certified divers can take two introductory dives on Nitrox/Safe Air in 1 day for A$220 (US$176).

**Deep Sea Divers Den** (✆ **07/4046 7333;** www.divers-den.com) does day trips to the Outer Reef on two vessels. On the *Reef Quest,* the cost is A$85 (US$68) for snorkelers. Divers pay A$120 (US$96) for two dives or A$140 (US$112) for three, plus A$20 (US$16) gear hire. A day trip with an introductory dive is A$145 (US$116), or A$185

### *Tips* Pressed for Time?

If you don't have time for a full day on the Outer Reef, don't forget that you can dive the coral cay of **Green Island,** just 27km (16 miles) off Cairns, in half a day (see "Exploring the Islands & Beaches," in the Cairns section, later in this chapter). Just remember you can't fly for 24 hours after a dive.

### Tips Money-Saving Tip

Dive-course prices drop if you travel to the Reef each day for your practical sessions, instead of living aboard the company's boat. Of course, then you have to pay for your meals and accommodations on land, so tally up the cost for both before you commit to either.

If time is short, a **Professional Association of Diving Instructors (PADI)** referral course might suit you. You can do your pool and theory work at home and spend 2 or 3 days on the Reef doing your qualifying dives.

(US$148) with two dives. Prices are slighter higher on the more upmarket *SeaQuest* boat. Departures are daily at 8am.

***TAKA*** (✆ **07/4051 8722;** fax 07/4031 2739; www.taka.com.au) is a new 30m (98-ft.) live-aboard vessel that makes a 3-night trip to the ribbon reefs Cod Hole, Clam Garden, Agincourt, and Opal. The boat carries a maximum of 22 people in air-conditioned stateroom, deluxe double, standard double cabins, or quad-share cabins. The trip costs from A$1,000 to A$1,400 (US$800–US$1,120), depending on your choice of cabin, and includes hotel pickups and all meals. Dive gear rental is A$80 (US$64) extra. An alternative 4-night journey to the Coral Sea is A$1,150 to A$1,600 (US$920–US$1,280) per person. Gear rental is A$100 (US$80) extra on this trip. TAKA runs underwater photography courses in conjunction with its trips for A$200 (US$160) plus camera hire of A$100 (US$80) per day. Add reef tax of A$25 (US$20) per person to prices.

**FROM PORT DOUGLAS** The waters off Port Douglas are home to coral spires and swim-throughs at the Cathedrals; giant clams and pelagics at Barracuda Pass; a village of parrot fish, anemone fish, unicorn fish, and two Moray eels at the pinnacle of Nursery Bommie; fan corals at Split-Bommie; and many other wonderful sites.

***Poseidon*** (✆ **07/4099 4772;** www.poseidon-cruises.com.au) is a fast 24m (79-ft.) vessel that visits three Outer Reef sites. The day-trip price of A$145 (US$116) for adults, A$110 (US$88) for kids 3 to 12, includes snorkel gear, a marine biology talk, snorkel safaris, lunch, and pickups from Port Douglas hotels. Certified divers pay A$40 (US$32) extra for two dives or A$55 (US$44) extra for three, plus A$20 (US$16) gear rental. Guides will accompany you, free of charge, to show you great locations. Introductory divers pay A$50 (US$40) extra for one dive and A$40 (US$32) each for the second and third. The vessel carries no more than 48 passengers, less than half its capacity, and gets you to the Reef in just over an hour, giving you 5 hours on the coral. The boat departs Marina Mirage daily at 8:30am. Transfers from Cairns and the Northern Beaches cost an extra A$15 (US$12) per adult and A$10 (US$8) per child for kids 3 to 12.

**The Quicksilver Connections** (see "Day Trips to the Reef," earlier in this chapter) runs dive-tender boats from its pontoon.

**FROM MISSION BEACH** **Quick Cat Dive Adventures** (see "Day Trips to the Reef," earlier in this chapter) takes divers on its day cruises to the Reef.

**FROM TOWNSVILLE** Off Townsville, you can dive not only the Reef but also a wreck, the ***Yongala*** ★, which lies off the coast in 30m (98 ft.) of water with good visibility. A cyclone sent the *Yongala* with 49 passengers and 72 crewmembers to the bottom

of the sea in 1911. Today it's surrounded by a mass of coral and rich marine life, including barracuda, grouper, rays, and turtles. **Diving Dreams** (✆ **07/4721 2500;** fax 07/4721 2549; www.divingdreams.com) runs a day trip for around A$260 (US$208) and 2- or 3-day trips, which include dives at the *Yongala,* for around A$445 to A$545 (US$356–US$436).

**FROM THE WHITSUNDAYS** In and around the Whitsunday Islands, you can visit the Outer Reef and explore the many excellent dive sites close to shore. One of the more established companies is **Reef Dive** (✆ **1800/075 120** in Australia, or 07/4946 6508; www.reefdive.com.au). Expect to pay about A$560 (US$448) per person for a 3-day, 3-night trip.

**DIVE COURSES** Many companies in Queensland offer dive courses, from open-water certification up to dive master, rescue diver, and instructor level. To take a course, you will need a medical exam by a Queensland doctor (your dive school will arrange it). You will also need two passport photos for your certificate, and you must be able to swim! Some courses take as few as 3 days, but 5 days is generally regarded as the best. Open-water certification usually requires 2 days of theory in a pool, followed by 2 or 3 days out on the Reef, where you make between four and nine dives.

**Deep Sea Divers Den** (✆ **07/4046 7333;** fax 07/4031 1210; www.divers-den.com) has been in operation since 1974 and claims to have certified about 55,000 divers. The 5-day open-water course involves 2 days of theory in the pool in Cairns, and 3 days and 2 nights on a live-aboard boat. The course costs A$590 (US$472) per person, including all meals on the boat, nine dives (one a guided night dive), all your gear, a wet suit, and transfers from your city hotel. The same course over 4 nights, with 1 night on the boat and four dives, costs A$480 (US$384). New courses begin every day of the week.

Other dive-course operators in Cairns include **Quicksilver Dive** (✆ 07/4099 5050; www.quicksilverdive.com.au), **Pro Dive** (✆ 07/4031 5255; www.prodive-cairns.com.au), **Down Under Dive** (see above), **TAKA Dive** (see above), and **Tusa Dive** (✆ 07/4040 6464). **Great Adventures** (✆ 07/4044 9944 or 1800/079 080; www.greatadventures.com.au) runs courses on Green Island off Cairns. In Townsville, **Diving Dreams** (see above) runs courses for all levels of diver. In the Whitsundays, contact **Reef Dive** (✆ 07/4946 6508; www.reefdive.com.au), and in Bundaberg, contact **Salty's Dive Centre** (✆ 07/4151 6422; www.saltys.com.au).

### *Tips* Diving Made Easy

Can't swim? Don't want to get your hair wet? Don't worry—you can still get underwater and see the wonders of the Reef. Several companies offer travelers the chance to don a dive helmet and "walk" underwater. Similar to old-style diving helmets, which allow you to breathe underwater, the helmet has air pumped into it by a hose. You walk into the water to a depth of about 4m (13 ft.), accompanied by instructors, and the reef is right before you. **Quicksilver Connections** calls it "Ocean Walker"; with **Sunlover Cruises** and at **Green Island Resort,** it's "Sea Walker." You must be at least 10 for the Sea Walker or 12 years for the Ocean Walkerold. The cost is about A$130 (US$104) for 20 minutes.

## 2 Cairns

346km (207 miles) N of Townsville; 1,807km (1,084 miles) N of Brisbane

The Great Barrier Reef and the Wet Tropics Rainforest, both World Heritage attractions, are just a short hop from each other, offering glimpses of two completely different environments. In parts of the far north, the rainforest touches the reef. Cairns is the gateway to these natural attractions, and to man-made attractions such as the Skyrail Rainforest Cableway. It's also a stepping-stone to islands of the Great Barrier Reef and the grasslands of the Gulf Savannah.

When international tourism to the Great Barrier Reef boomed a decade or two ago, Cairns boomed with it. What was once a small farming town boasts five-star hotels, island resorts, big Reef-cruise catamarans in the harbor, and too many souvenir shops.

The 110-million-year-old rainforest, the **Daintree,** where plants that are fossils elsewhere in the world exist in living color, is just a couple of hours north of Cairns. The Daintree is part of the Wet Tropics, a World Heritage–listed area that stretches from north of Townsville to south of Cooktown, beyond Cairns, and houses half of Australia's animal and plant species.

If you are spending more than a day or two in the area, consider basing yourself on the city's pretty northern beaches, in Kuranda, or in Port Douglas (see "Port Douglas, Daintree & the Cape Tribulation Area," later in this chapter). Although prices will be higher in the peak season, which is the Australian winter and early spring from July to October, the town has affordable accommodations year-round.

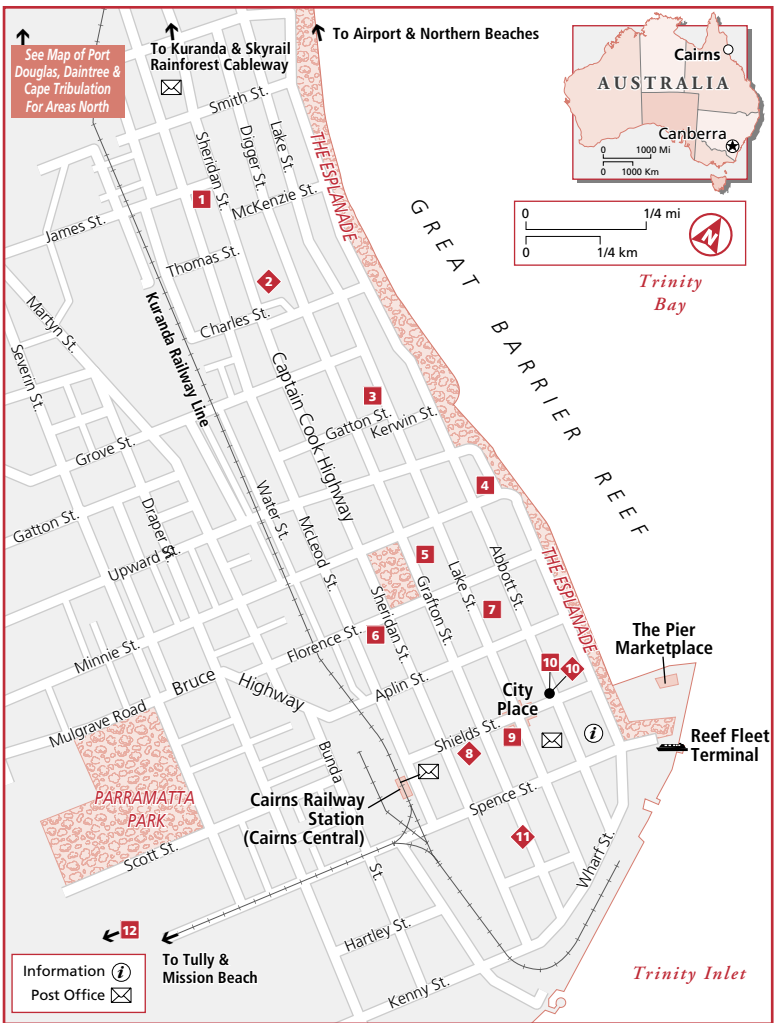
### ESSENTIALS

**GETTING THERE** **By Plane** **Qantas** (✆ **13 13 13** in Australia, or 800/227-4500 in the U.S. and Canada) has direct flights throughout the day to Cairns from Sydney and Brisbane, and at least one flight a day from Darwin, Uluru (Ayers Rock), and Perth. From Melbourne you can sometimes fly direct, but most flights connect through Sydney or Brisbane. **QantasLink** also flies from Townsville, Hamilton Island in the Whitsundays, and Alice Springs. **Virgin Blue** (✆ **13 67 89** in Australia, or 07/3295 2296) flies to Cairns direct from Brisbane, Sydney, and Melbourne. **Jetstar** (✆ **13 15 38** in Australia, or 03/8341 4901) flies from Brisbane twice a day. New Qantas international subsidiary **Australian Airlines** (✆ **1300/799 798** in Australia, or book through Qantas, 800/227-4500 in the U.S. and Canada) links Cairns with Sydney and the Gold Coast. Several international carriers serve Cairns from various Asian cities and New Zealand.

**Cairns Airport** is 8km (5 miles) north of downtown. The domestic and international terminals are linked by a covered walkway—it takes about 5 minutes to walk between the two. The **Australia Coach** (✆ **07/4048 8355**) shuttle, which costs A$7 (US$5.60) per person (children under 14 travel free), meets major flights at both terminals for transfers to city hotels. **Sun Palm Express Coaches** (✆ **07/4084 2626**) provides transfers from the airport to the city and northern beaches. The one-way fare to the city is A$13 (US$10) adults and A$7.50 (US$6) children 4 to 14, and to Palm Cove is A$15 (US$12) adults and A$7.50 (US$6) children.

A taxi from the airport costs around A$15 (US$12) to the city, A$30 (US$24) to Trinity Beach, and A$40 (US$32) to Palm Cove. Call **Black & White Taxis** (✆ **13 10 08** in Australia).

**Avis, Budget, Hertz,** and **Thrifty** all have car-rental offices at the domestic and international terminals (see "Getting Around," below).




## ACCOMMODATIONS

- Bay Village Tropical Retreat **3**
- Cairns Plaza Hotel **4**
- Club Crocodile Hides Hotel **9**
- Coral Tree Inn **5**
- Flying Horseshoe Motel **1**
- Inn Cairns **10**
- Inn the Tropics **6**
- Oasis Resort Cairns **5**
- Uptop Downunder **12**

## DINING

- Fishlips Bar & Bistro **2**
- Red Ochre Grill **8**
- Perrotta's **10**
- Thai Pan **11**

**Tips Croc Alert!**

Dangerous crocodiles inhabit Cairns waterways. Do not swim in, or stand on the bank of, any river or stream.

**By Train** Long-distance trains operated by Queensland Rail's **Traveltrain** (✆ **13 22 32** in Queensland, or 07/3235 1122; www.traveltrain.com.au) run from Brisbane several times a week. The new 160kmph (99-mph) **Tilt Train** takes about 25 hours and costs A$295 (US$236) for business class. Northbound trains leave Brisbane at 6:25pm on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday; southbound runs depart Cairns at 8:15am on Wednesday, Friday, and Sunday. The train's luxury business class features an entertainment system for each seat, including multiple movie and audio channels.

The ***Sunlander,*** which runs four times a week between Brisbane and Cairns, takes 32 hours and costs A$197 (US$158) for a sitting berth, A$253 (US$202) for an economy-class sleeper, A$398 (US$318) for a first-class sleeper, or A$725 (US$580) for all-inclusive Queenslander class (only available twice a week). Trains pull into the Cairns Central terminal (✆ **13 22 32** in Australia for reservations, or 07/4036 9250 for the terminal from 9am–5pm weekdays or 8:30am–noon Saturdays) on Bunda Street in the center of town. The station has no showers, lockers, or currency exchange booths, but you will find 24-hour ATMs outside the Cairns Central shopping mall, right above the terminal.

For more details on Queensland's long-haul trains, see "Getting Around Australia" in chapter 2.

**By Bus** **Greyhound Australia** (✆ **13 14 99**, or 07/4690 9950) buses pull into Trinity Wharf Centre on Wharf Street in the center of town. Buses travel from the south via all towns and cities on the Bruce Highway, and from the west from Alice Springs and Darwin via Tennant Creek on the Stuart Highway and the Outback mining town of Mount Isa to Townsville, where they join the Bruce Highway and head north.

The 46-hour Sydney-Cairns trip costs A$301 (US$241); the 30-hour trip from Brisbane is A$201 (US$161); and from Darwin, the journey takes about 38 hours and costs A$441 (US$353).

**By Car** From Brisbane and all major towns in the south, you'll enter Cairns on the Bruce Highway. To reach the northern beaches or Port Douglas from Cairns, take Sheridan Street in the city center, which becomes the Captain Cook Highway.

**VISITOR INFORMATION** Tourism Tropical North Queensland's **Gateway Discovery Centre,** 51 The Esplanade, Cairns, QLD 4870 (✆ **07/4051 3588;** fax 07/4051 0127; www.tropicalaustralia.com), has information on Cairns and its environs, Mission Beach, Port Douglas, the Daintree Rain Forest, Cape York, and Outback Queensland. It's open daily from 8:30am to 5:30pm, and 10am to 2pm on public holidays. Closed December 25.

**CITY LAYOUT** A major redevelopment of the Cairns Esplanade, completed in 2003, transformed the face of the city. The focal point is a 4,000-sq.-m (40,000-sq.-ft.) saltwater swimming lagoon with a wide sandy beach and surrounding parkland with public artworks and picnic areas. Suspended over the mud flats and providing a platform for birding, a timber boardwalk runs 600m (1,800 ft.) along the waterfront and is lit for nighttime use. A walkway links the Esplanade to the Reef Fleet Terminal, the

departure point for Great Barrier Reef boats. Downtown Cairns is on a grid 5 blocks deep, bounded in the east by the Esplanade on the water and in the west by McLeod Street, where the train station and the Cairns Central shopping mall are. In between are shops, offices, and restaurants.

Heading 15 minutes north from the city along the Captain Cook Highway, you come to the **northern beaches:** Machans, Holloways, Yorkeys Knob, Trinity, Kewarra, Clifton, Palm Cove, and Ellis.

**GETTING AROUND** **By Bus** **Sunbus** (✆ **07/4057 7411**) buses depart City Place Mall at the intersection of Lake and Shields streets. Buy all tickets and passes on board, and try to have correct change. You can hail buses anywhere it's convenient for the driver to stop. Bus nos. 2 and 2A travel to Trinity Beach; nos. 1 and 1X (weekend express) travel to Palm Cove. The N route runs along the highway from the city to Palm Cove until 2:25am on Friday and Saturday nights, stopping at all beaches in between. Most other buses run from early morning until almost midnight.

**By Car** **Avis** (✆ 07/4051 5911), **Budget** (✆ 07/4051 9222), **Hertz** (✆ 07/4051 6399), and **Thrifty** (✆ 07/4051 8099) have offices in Cairns city and at the airport. One long-established local outfit, **Sugarland Car Rentals** (✆ 07/4052 1300), has reasonable rates. **Britz Campervan Rentals** (✆ 1800/331 454 in Australia, or 07/4032 2611), **Budget Campervan Rentals** (✆ 07/4032 2065), and **Maui Rentals** (✆ 1300/363 800 in Australia, or 07/4032 2065) rent motor homes. Britz and most major rental-car companies rent four-wheel-drive vehicles.

**By Taxi** Call **Black & White Taxis** (✆ **13 10 08** in Australia).

## WHERE TO STAY

Cairns has a good supply of affordable accommodations, both in the heart of the city and along the northern beaches. You can also stay in the peaceful village of Kuranda or get away from it all at an island resort.

### IN CAIRNS

Unless noted otherwise, shops, restaurants, cinemas, bus terminals, the train station, and the Reef Fleet Terminal for Great Barrier Reef cruises are all within walking distance of the following accommodations.

**Bay Village Tropical Retreat** ★ A swimming pool tucked in a lush garden courtyard adds to the charm at this two-story hotel 1km (½ mile) from the city center. It offers studio rooms, family rooms, and one-, two- and three-bedroom apartments. All are smartly decorated with rattan cane furniture and have cool tiled or polished floors. There's lots of space, and helpful staff members are always around. Facilities include an Internet room, free barbecue, and a restaurant.

Corner Lake and Gatton sts., Cairns, QLD 4870. ✆ **07/4051 4622**. Fax 07/4051 4057. www.bayvillage.com.au. 63 units (most with shower only). A$140 (US$112) double; A$155 (US$124) studio; A$175 (US$140) 1-bedroom apt;

*Value* **Travel Tip**

If you stay in Cairns, check out what there is to see and do in and around Port Douglas (see "Port Douglas, Daintree & the Cape Tribulation Area," later in this chapter). Many tour operators in Port Douglas offer free or inexpensive transfers from Cairns.

A$235 (US$188) 2-bedroom apt; A$280 (US$224) 3-bedroom apt. Extra person A$25 (US$20). Crib A$6 (US$4.80). Children under 15 stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, MC, V. Limited free parking. **Amenities**: Restaurant; bar; outdoor pool; free airport shuttle; room service; coin-op laundry. *In-room:* A/C, TV, kitchenette (in apts), coffeemaker, hair dryer.

**Cairns Bed & Breakfast** Graham and Connie Ball's B&B is 5km (3 miles) away from the airport or city in a pleasant suburb close to good restaurants and the bus, and on the edge of a conservation wetlands area popular with bird-watchers. Each cool, tile-floored room has its own entrance; all are furnished in Laura Ashley, with throw rugs, embroidered towels, and framed prints. Hair dryers are available. Breakfast is served by the pool. Your hosts are a good source for advice on tours, and Connie will even give you her own guided local tour. Most tours pick up from the door.

48 Russell St., Edge Hill, Cairns, QLD 4870. ✆ **07/4032 4121.** Fax 07/4053 6557. www.cairnsbnb.com.au. 3 units (all with shower only). A$89 (US$71) single; A$99 (US$79) double. Extra person A$20 (US$16). Rates include full breakfast. No credit cards. Free on-street parking. Free transfers from airport, trains, and coach terminals (arrange when booking). **Amenities:** Outdoor pool; laundry service. *In-room:* A/C, TV.

**Club Crocodile Hides Hotel** Time has left this colonial three-story hotel overlooking a pedestrian plaza in the center of town a little worse for the wear, but it does have redeeming features, such as the high ceilings with ornate plasterwork, new carpets, and fresh paint in all the rooms. Choose from smallish rooms in the original 1885 building or larger, lighter tile-floored rooms in the 1960s wing. Most rooms have no views, but a few open onto a huge veranda that overlooks the busy streets. This is a great spot to eat your basic breakfast, but it gets very noisy on Friday and Saturday nights when the public bar below starts to roar. There's 24-hour reception, and dive training classes are held in the pool.

87 Lake St., Cairns, QLD 4870. ✆ **07/4051 1266.** Fax 07/4031 2276. www.clubcroc.com.au. 105 units, 80 with bathroom (68 with shower only). A$90 (US$72) double without bathroom; A$112–A$140 (US$90–US$112) double with bathroom; A$150 (US$120) family room (sleeps 4); A$140 (US$112) 1-bedroom apt. Rates include continental breakfast and dinner. Ask about packages. AE, DC, MC, V. Free secured parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor pool; tour desk; room service; coin-op laundry. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, fridge, coffeemaker, safe.

**Coral Tree Inn** *Value* The focal point of this airy, modern resort-style motel a 5-minute walk from the city center is the friendly communal kitchen that overlooks the palm-lined saltwater pool and sun deck. It's a great spot to cook a steak or reef fish filet on the free barbecue and join other guests at the big, shared tables. Local restaurants deliver, free fresh-roasted coffee is on all day, and a vending machine sells wine and beer, so you don't even have to go down to the pub for supplies! The smallish, basic but neat motel rooms have painted brick walls, terra-cotta tile or carpeted floors, and new bathrooms with marble-look laminate countertops. In contrast, the eight suites, which have kitchenettes, are huge and stylish enough to do any corporate traveler proud. They are some of the best-value accommodations in town. All rooms have a private balcony or patio; some look out onto the drab commercial buildings next door, but most face the pool. Ask about packages that include cruises and other tours.

166–172 Grafton St., Cairns, QLD 4870. ✆ **07/4031 3744.** Fax 07/4031 3064. www.coraltreeinn.com.au. 58 units. A$118 (US$94) double; A$145 (US$116) suite. Extra person A$10 (US$8). AE, DC, MC, V. Limited free parking; ample street parking. **Amenities:** Bar; outdoor saltwater pool; access to nearby health club; bike rental; tour desk; car-rental desk; airport shuttle; babysitting; coin-op laundry; laundry service; same-day dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms; safe (at reception). *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, kitchenette (suites only), fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

**Flying Horseshoe Motel** You will find clean rooms and a warm welcome at this pleasant spot halfway between the airport and the city center. It is a short bus or taxi

ride, or a pleasant 30-minute walk along the Esplanade to the city. Breathe in the balmy evening air from your balcony, gather round the pool for a buffet, or soak in the courtyard Jacuzzi. Every room is freshly decorated and spacious; executive suites are slightly bigger and have desks and dataports. The apartments are by a main road, so expect some traffic noise. There is 24-hour reception and free newspaper delivery. The bus to the city stops just across the road. Nonsmoking rooms are available.

281–289 Sheridan St., Cairns, QLD 4870. ✆ **07/4051 3022.** Fax 07/4031 2761. www.flyinghorseshoe.com.au. 51 units (shower only). A$75 (US$60) double; A$135 (US$108) executive suite; A$155 (US$124) family apt (sleeps 6). AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. Free pickup from airport, train or bus station. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor pool; Jacuzzi; tour desk; car-rental desk; secretarial services; massage (in room); babysitting; coin-op laundry; dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/free in-house movies, dataport (suites only), kitchenette (suites and apts only), minibar, hair dryer.

**Lilybank Bed & Breakfast** ★ This 1870s Queenslander homestead, originally a mayor's residence, is in a leafy suburb 6km (3¾ miles) from the airport and a 10-minute drive from the city. The large, attractive guest rooms, individually decorated with such features as wrought-iron beds and patchwork quilts, have good-size bathrooms. The largest room has French doors opening onto a "sleep-out" (an enclosed veranda with two extra beds). You can also stay in the gardener's cottage, with slate floors, stained-glass windows, a king-size bed, and a bar. The house is set in gardens with an attractive rock-lined saltwater pool. Breakfast is served in the garden room by the fishpond. Gregarious hosts Mike and Pat Woolford share their house with three poodles, an irrepressible galah, and a giant green tree frog. There's a guest TV lounge and kitchen, and phone, fax, and e-mail access. Many tours pick up at the door, and several good restaurants are a stroll away, so you don't need a car to stay here. A taxi from the airport costs approximately A$15 (US$12). No smoking indoors.

75 Kamerunga Rd., Stratford, Cairns, QLD 4870. ✆ **07/4055 1123.** Fax 07/4058 1990. www.lilybank.com.au. 6 units (4 with shower only). A$88–A$110 (US$70–US$88) double. Extra person A$33 (US$26). Rates include full breakfast. Children not accepted. AE, MC, V. Free parking. Bus: 1E or 1G. Bus stop 120m (394 ft.) away. **Amenities:** Outdoor pool; tour desk; massage (on request); coin-op laundry; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, hair dryer, no phone.

## Super-Cheap Sleeps

**Inn the Tropics** ★ A cut above a backpacker hostel, this cheerful, well-run lodge in the city center has small, simple but appealing private rooms with well-lit, clean private bathrooms with plenty of counter space, and freshly painted concrete brick walls. Homey touches abound, from the framed Monet prints to the ornamental seahorses on the doors. The shared bathrooms are very clean. There's a communal kitchen, open 24 hours, or a courtyard barbecue where guests can cook their own dinner. The management provides currency exchange and e-mail access.

141 Sheridan St., Cairns, QLD 4870. ✆ **1800/807 055** in Australia, or 07/4031 1088. Fax 07/4051 7110. www.cairns.net.au/~innthetropics. 51 units, 6 with bathroom (shower only). A$38 (US$30) single without bathroom; A$48 (US$38) single with bathroom; A$48 (US$38) double without bathroom; A$59 (US$47) double with bathroom; A$55 (US$44) triple share (or families of 4) without bathroom; A$20 (US$16) dorm bed. AE, DC, MC, V. Limited free parking. **Amenities:** Outdoor pool; bike rental; tour desk; car-rental desk; airport shuttle; coin-op laundry. *In room:* A/C (coin-op), TV (in some), fridge, coffeemaker.

**Uptop Downunder** After a hard day's sightseeing, it's a pleasure to return to the lounge chairs around the palm-lined pool at this cheerful backpacker lodge set amid an acre of tropical gardens. The 4-bed dorm rooms are clean; the private rooms are simple but airy and clean, with a single bed, twin, or doubles. There are no bunks here, and all the mattresses are inner-sprung. Some are air-conditioned (a must

Nov–Mar), others have fans. Don't fuss about sharing the showers—the communal bathroom block and laundry are super clean. The staff is friendly; amenities include a communal kitchen and dining area, a barbecue, free tea and coffee, a basic grocery store and snack bar, two TV/video lounges, telephones, free e-mail access, and safes. Advance bookings are advisable in peak times (July and Nov).

164 Spence St., Cairns, QLD 4870. ✆ **1800/243 944** in Australia, or 07/4051 3636. Fax 07/4052 1211. 45 units, none with bathroom. A$30 (US$24) single; A$40 (US$32) double; A$18 (US$14) dorm bed. Ask about specials and packages. AE, MC, V. Free parking for 15 cars. Free transfer from airport, train, or coach terminal (book in advance, or call when you arrive). Lodge runs free shuttle to town throughout the day. **Amenities:** Large outdoor pool; bike rental; tour desk; coin-op laundry. *In room:* A/C (in some), fridge.

## Worth a Splurge

**Cairns Plaza Hotel** The harbor views at this seven-story complex are better than those at most of the more luxurious hotels in Cairns. Two blocks from town, the accommodations are a good size, with fresh, appealing furnishings and modern bathrooms. Suites and studios have kitchenettes. If your balcony does not have a water vista, you overlook a nice aspect of the city or mountains instead. Families can book a connecting suite and standard room to create more space and privacy.

145 The Esplanade (at Minnie St.), Cairns, QLD 4870. ✆ **1800/117 787** in Australia, or 07/4051 4688. Fax 07/4051 8129. www.cairnsplaza.com.au. 60 units. A$145–A$155 (US$116–US$124) double; A$185 (US$148) suite; A$260 (US$208) connecting units. Extra person A$25 (US$20). AE, DC, MC, V. Limited free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; small outdoor pool; golf course nearby; 4 lit tennis courts nearby; access to nearby health club; Jacuzzi; tour desk; car-rental desk; limited room service; massage; babysitting; coin-op laundry; dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV w/free movies, dataport, kitchenette (in some), minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

**Inn Cairns** ★ If you want stylish surroundings, you'll like these spacious new one-bedroom apartments in the town center. They feature terra-cotta floors, wrought-iron and rattan furniture, and timber-louvered blinds. The roomy bathrooms are equally smart, with thick white towels. Guests can enjoy the sun on the rooftop deck, which has palms and views to the sea, or around the small but elegant pool and barbecue gazebo. Each apartment has an intercom system for security. Hair dryers are available at reception. Stock up on supplies at the supermarket across the road, or dine at the bistro downstairs. You're 3 blocks from where the Great Barrier Reef cruises depart.

71 Lake St., Cairns, QLD 4870. ✆ **07/4041 2350.** Fax 07/4041 2420. www.inncairns.com.au. 38 units. A$132 (US$106) double low season (Dec–June); A$158 (US$126) double high season (July–Oct). Extra person A$20 (US$16). Free cribs. AE, DC, MC, V. Free secure covered parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; small outdoor pool; airport shuttle. *In room:* A/C, TV/VCR, laundry.

**Oasis Resort Cairns** *Value* The large pool, complete with swim-up bar and a little sandy beach, is the focus of this attractive six-story resort built in 1997. All the colorful, contemporary rooms have balconies with views over the tropical gardens, the mountains, or the pool. The suites, with a TV in the bedroom and a large Jacuzzi bathtub, could well be the best-value suites in town.

122 Lake St., Cairns, QLD 4870. ✆ **07/4080 1888.** Fax 07/4080 1889. www.oasis-cairns.com.au. 314 units. A$235–A$265 (US$188–US$212) double; A$405 (US$324) suite. Extra person A$44 (US$35). Children under 16 stay free in parent's room with existing bedding. Free crib. Ask about packages. AE, DC, MC, V. Free valet and self-parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; 2 bars; outdoor pool; health club; concierge; tour desk; airport shuttle; limited room service; babysitting; coin-op laundry; laundry service; dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, dataport, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron, safe.

### Tips Safe Swimming

Northern beaches have small, netted enclosures for swimming from October to May because ocean swimming off the Queensland beaches becomes quite dangerous when the poisonous marine stingers (jellyfish) are present.

## ON THE NORTHERN BEACHES

**Beaches at Holloways** Relaxed owners David and Josephine Hopkins have given over the upstairs of their light-filled home opposite Holloways Beach to guests. Rooms are fresh and comfortable; bathrooms are pretty and practical; and bathrobes are supplied. Two front rooms open onto a lovely bougainvillea-clad veranda overlooking the sea. There's a guest TV lounge. Several inexpensive restaurants, including a good alfresco Italian BYO, are just down the road. No smoking indoors.

2 Marietta St., Holloways Beach, Cairns, QLD 4870. ✆ **07/4055 9972.** Fax 07/4055 9886. www.beaches-at-holloways.com.au. 3 units (2 with shower only). A$66 (US$53) single; A$88 (US$70) double. Rates include full breakfast. MC, V. Free on-street parking. Bus: 1C, 1H, or N. **Amenities:** Outdoor pool; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, hair dryer.

**Castaways Trinity Beach** You're a block from Trinity Beach at these roomy, well-equipped apartments with friendly managers. The furnishings are rather dated, but each has everything a family or couple could want for a penny-wise vacation—a kitchen, comfy living and dining area, large bedrooms, laundry, balcony, and a poolside barbecue. Servicing is weekly, and there is access to Internet and fax facilities. A general store, a pub, and inexpensive eateries are just down the road.

63–73 Moore St. (at Trinity Beach Rd.), Trinity Beach, Cairns, QLD 4879. ✆ **07/4057 6699.** Fax 07/4057 6565. www.castawaystrinitybeach.com.au. 43 units (with shower only). A$99–A$132 (US$79–US$106) 1-bedroom apt; A$124–A$165 (US$99–US$132) 2-bedroom apt. Extra person A$20 (US$16). Crib and high chair A$7 (US$5.60). Children under 3 stay free in parent's room. Weekly rates available. Minimum 3-night stay on long weekends and school holidays. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. Bus: 1, 1A, 3X, or N. **Amenities:** 3 saltwater pools; 3 Jacuzzis; tour desk; car-rental desk; babysitting. *In room:* A/C, TV, kitchen, laundry.

**Ellis Beach Oceanfront Bungalows** ★ *Finds* On arguably the loveliest of the northern beaches, about 30 minutes from Cairns, these bungalows and cabins sit under palm trees between the Coral Sea and a backdrop of mountainous rainforest. Lifeguards patrol the beach, and there are stinger nets in season as well as a shady pool and toddlers' wading pool. There's plenty of privacy, and the accommodations are basic but pleasant. You can sit on the veranda and gaze at the ocean. Keep an eye out for dolphins. Each bungalow and cabin sleeps four and has full kitchen facilities (with microwave, fridge, and freezer), but cabins have no bathroom (they use the communal facilities at the campground in the same complex). The property has coin-operated barbecues and phone and fax facilities.

Captain Cook Hwy., Ellis Beach, QLD 4879. ✆ **1800/637 036** in Australia, or 07/4055 3538. Fax 07/4055 3077. www.ellisbeachbungalows.com. 15 units (all with shower only). A$68–A$75 (US$54–US$60) cabin; A$155–A$175 (US$124–US$140) bungalow. Extra person A$15 (US$12) cabin, A$25 (US$20) bungalow. 3-night minimum June–Sept; 2-night minimum Oct–May. AE, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; 2 outdoor pools; golf course nearby; tour desk; car-rental desk; coin-op laundry. *In room:* A/C, TV, kitchen, iron, no phone.

**The Reef Retreat** ★★ Tucked back one row of buildings from the beach is this little gem—a low-rise collection of contemporary studios and suites built around a swimming pool in a peaceful grove of palms and silver paperbarks. All the rooms have

cool tile floors and smart teak and cane furniture. The studios, renovated in 1996, are a terrific value and much larger than the average hotel room. In the oceanview suites, you can even lie in bed and see the sea. The extra-private honeymoon suites (and some oceanview suites), built in 1997, have a Jacuzzi and a kitchenette outside on the balcony; a total of 20 units have Jacuzzis. There's a barbecue and a Jacuzzi on the grounds. There's no elevator. Units are cleaned twice weekly; one free cleaning for stays of 5 days or longer. Extra cleanings cost A$20 to A$30 (US$16–US$24).

10–14 Harpa St., Palm Cove, Cairns, QLD 4879. ✆ **07/4059 1744.** Fax 07/4059 1745. www.reefretreat.com.au. 36 units (all with shower only). A$150 (US$120) studio double; A$160 (US$128) suite; A$170 (US$136) suite with Jacuzzi; A$180 (US$144) oceanview suite; A$270 (US$216) 2-bedroom apt for up to 4. Extra person A$25 (US$20). Children under 3 stay free in parent's room with existing bedding. Crib A$25 (US$20). AE, MC, V. Free parking. Bus: 1, 1B 1X, 2X, or N. **Amenities:** Outdoor saltwater pool; nearby golf course; nearby tennis courts; Jacuzzi; tour desk; car-rental desk; airport shuttle (A$15/US$12 per person one-way); coin-op laundry; laundry service; dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, kitchenette, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

## IN KURANDA

A 30-minute winding mountain drive, a 90-minute train trip, or a 40-minute Skyrail gondola ride over the treetops brings you to this pretty village in the hills behind Cairns. A local bus travels from two to five times a day from Cairns city for A$4 (US$3.20) one-way. Kuranda is cool, rainforest-y, and blissfully peaceful, despite the daily influx of tourists from the city. There are a handful of good restaurants and quite a lot to see and do. One drawback is that not many tours pick up here.

**Kuranda Rainforest Accommodation Park** *Value* The rainforest and exotic, parklike gardens are the setting for this combination of clean, comfortable cabins, budget rooms, and campsites. Annette and Hans Christensen have established their getaway on 10 acres a short walk from Kuranda's amenities, including Internet access. You can take a canoe on the nearby Barron River or go spotlighting on the grounds at night to see some of the local wildlife. There's also a public phone/fax and a store.

88 Kuranda Heights Rd., Kuranda, QLD 4881. ✆ **07/4093 7316.** www.kurandarainforestpark.com.au. 11 units, with private bathroom (shower only); 8 veranda rooms, with shared bathrooms. A$95–A$100 (US$76–US$80) family bungalows; A$75–A$85 (US$60–US$68) rainforest or poolside bungalows; A$65–A$75 (US$52–US$60) double park units; A$20 (US$16) single and A$35 (US$28) double for budget rooms (sleeps 4). Extra adult A$10 (US$8), extra child age 2–14 A$6 (US$4.80). A$12 (US$9.60) single and A$17 (US$14) double for unpowered campsites; A$14 (US$11) single and A$20 (US$16) double for powered sites. Extra adult A$6 (US$4.80) and extra child A$3 (US$2.40) for camping. MC, V. **Amenities:** Large saltwater pool; tour desk. *In room:* TV.

## ON AN ISLAND

Of several island resorts off Cairns, the Fitzroy Island Resort is the most affordable. It is idyllic, but every time you want to join a tour or go shopping on the mainland, you must pay for a transfer—about A$35 (US$28) round-trip.

**Fitzroy Island Resort** This is probably the most affordable island resort on the Great Barrier Reef. It's targeted at a young crowd looking for action and eco-fun in a pristine, beautiful location. It's no glamour-puss palace—a revamp in 2000 added a Hard Rock Cafe–style restaurant and spruced up the interiors. Fitzroy is a continental island offering little in the way of fringing coral and only a few narrow strips of coral sand. What it does have are catamarans, outrigger canoes, and surf skis; glass-bottom-boat rides; and hiking trails through dense national park forest to a lighthouse. Divers can make drift dives over the reefs dotted around the island to see manta rays, reef sharks, turtles, and coral. There is good snorkeling at two points around the island that you can reach twice a day on the dive boat, for an extra fee. You can also

catch the Sunlover Cruises day trip to the outer Great Barrier Reef. The dive shop runs introductory and certified dives and certification courses. Each of the modestly comfortable beach cabins has a queen-size bed and two bunks in the back, as well as a TV, minifridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, and iron. The rooms have ceiling fans and a large balcony with views through the trees to the sea. The bunkhouse accommodations are basic fan-cooled carpeted rooms with bunks, beds, or both. Bunkhouse guests can use the communal kitchen but must bring their own supplies from the mainland.

The restaurant is moderately priced, a kiosk sells takeout food, and the poolside grill and bar offers casual meals. The Raging Thunder Beach Bar Restaurant is open 6pm to 9pm during high season only.

Fitzroy Island, 35km (22 miles) southeast of Cairns (P.O. Box 1109, Cairns, QLD 4870). ✆ **07/4051 9588.** Fax 07/4052 1335. 8 cabins (all with shower only); 32 bunkhouses, none with private bathroom. Cabins A$220 (US$176) double. Extra person A$35 (US$28). Bunkhouses A$31 (US$25) per person per bed (sharing room with up to 3 other people); A$116 (US$93) double (sole use); A$250 (US$200) family bunkhouse for up to 4. Ask about packages. AE, DC, MC, V. Round-trip transfers 3 times daily from Cairns (approx. 45 min.) A$36 (US$29) adults, A$18 (US$14) children 4–14. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; bar; outdoor pool; watersports equipment; tour desk; dive shop.

## WHERE TO DINE

### IN CAIRNS

The Esplanade along the seafront is always good for a cost-conscious feed, as it's packed with cafes, pizzerias, fish-and-chips places, and ice-cream parlors. The Pier Marketplace on the waterfront has a food court with water views, or you can try the food court in the Cairns Central Mall over the railway station on McLeod Street. All but a few food outlets in the mall close at night.

**Perrotta's** MODERN AUSTRALIAN The locals flock here for brunch and lunch, particularly on weekends, and you can team it with a visit to the Cairns Regional Art Gallery (the cafe is just outside). Breakfast differs from the usual bacon and eggs or pancakes, offering delights such as smoked salmon and sweet-potato hash browns with sour cream and avocado. Sweet tooths may go for French toast with cinnamon, caramelized apples, and honey mascarpone. For lunch there's a choice of bruschetta, focaccia, panini, pasta dishes, or more individual dishes such as barbecued Cajun Spanish mackerel with tomato and basil salad. At dinner, try wild barramundi, braised duck leg, or lamb shanks. Remember to check out the specials board.

Abbott and Shields sts. ✆ **074031 5899.** Reservations recommended. Breakfast A$2.50–A$8 (US$2–US$6.40); lunch A$6.50–A$12 (US$5.20–US$9.60); main courses at dinner A$13–A$24 (US$10–US$19). MC, V. Daily 8:30am–late.

**Red Ochre Grill** ★ *Kids* GOURMET BUSH TUCKER You could accuse this restaurant/bar of using weird and wonderful Aussie ingredients as a gimmick to pull in crowds, but the diners who have flocked here for the past 10 years know good food when they taste it. Daily specials are big on fresh local seafood, and the regular menu—which changes often—lets you devour the Aussie coat of arms in several different ways. Try salt and native pepper crocodile and prawns with Vietnamese pickles and lemon aspen sambal, or kangaroo sirloin cooked over a mallee wood–fired grill, with a quandong chile glaze, sweet-potato fritter, and bok choy. It's slick enough for a big night out but still informal enough for a casual meal. It's independent, not part of the chain that has a branch in Alice Springs. There's also a kids' menu.

43 Shields St. ✆ **07/4051 0100.** www.redochregrill.com.au. Reservations recommended. Main courses A$9–A$28 (US$7.20–US$22) at lunch, A$19–A$32 (US$15–US$26) at dinner; Australian game platter A$45 (US$36) per person; seafood platter A$60 (US$48) per person; Tastes of Australia 4-course set menu A$60 (US$48) per person (minimum 2 people). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily noon–midnight; public holidays 6pm–midnight. Closed Dec 25.

**Thai Pan** LAO/THAI Delicately fragrant curries and carefully prepared stir-fries and soups are served in this humble brick restaurant. Thai food is always a sure bet in Australia, and this place is no exception. Try the *pad gratium* (tender beef fried in a complex garlic sauce with crisp vegetables); one of the many seafood dishes, such as the mixed seafood cooked in basil and a hint of chile; or one of the plentiful vegetarian choices. The wine list is unremarkable, so bring your own. Licensed and BYO.

43–45 Grafton St. ✆ **07/4052 1708.** Reservations recommended. Main courses A$16–A$20 (US$13–US$16). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 5:30–10:30pm.

### Worth a Splurge

**Fishlips Bar & Bistro** ★★ MODERN AUSTRALIAN/SEAFOOD Ask locals where they go for seafood—as opposed to where they send tourists—and they direct you to this 1920s bluebird-blue shack about 2km (1¼ miles) from town. Chef Ian Candy is renowned for his flair and innovation with seafood. All dishes come in small or large servings, and the local barramundi, or "barra," shows up in several incarnations—maybe beer-battered with rough-cut chips (fries) and fresh tartar sauce, simply grilled, or served with eggplant pickle and rocket pesto on char-grilled zucchini and onion with charred polenta. There are plenty of non-seafood options. Be daring—try the crocodile, pan-fried with pine nuts, coriander, and cumin. For dessert, don't go past the homemade ice cream with flavors that change each week. How nice to see that almost every choice on the wine list comes by the glass. Dine inside (air-conditioned for those humid nights) or on the front deck, with its bright blue pots and palm trees.

228 Sheridan St. (between Charles and McKenzie sts.). ✆ **07/4041 1700.** www.fishlips.com.au. Reservations recommended. Main courses A$12–A$41 (US$9.60–US$33). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 6pm–late; Fri noon–2:30pm.

### ON THE NORTHERN BEACHES

**Colonies** MODERN AUSTRALIAN It may not have the ocean frontage of the grander restaurants along Williams Esplanade, but the veranda of this cheery little aerie upstairs behind a seafront building is still within earshot of the waves. The atmosphere is simple, and the menu includes loads of inexpensive choices, such as pastas, soups, green chicken curry, and seafood. Licensed and BYO.

Upstairs in Paradise Village shopping center, Williams Esplanade, Palm Cove. ✆ **07/4055 3058.** Fax 07/4059 1559. www.palmcoveonline.com/colonies. Reservations recommended. Main courses A$16–A$29 (US$13–US$23). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 10am–10:30pm. Closed mid-Jan to mid-Mar. Bus: 1, 1B, 1X, 2X, or N.

**L'Unico Trattoria** SEAFOOD/PASTA/PIZZA Right across from the beach, this smart but friendly restaurant has a definite Italian slant. The atmosphere is buzzy and the views of the ocean are superb. Ask for a table on the veranda to take advantage of the location right across from the beach. They use fresh local produce to create such

### Tips Cheap Eats at the RSL

RSL (Returned Services League) Clubs are great places for a cheap feed. Almost all Queensland towns have an RSL Club, and they all have restaurants with main courses usually priced at under A$20 (US$16). The food is pretty basic—roasts, pasta, and so on—and the decor usually modest. And if you fancy a flutter after your meal, most of them also have gaming machines and keno. If you're at the beach, try the local Surf Livesaving Club, which offers similar fare and prices. As they're clubs, you have to sign in at the door, but visitors are welcome.

dishes as angel hair pasta with Moreton Bay bugs, spinach, chile, and olive oil, or you can choose from the pastas and risotto or the array of seafood, chicken, and lamb dishes. For something simpler, try pizza with a variety of interesting toppings. There's a kids' menu too, and an extensive wine list of Australian and imported labels. Or you can BYO (corkage A$1.50/US$1.20 per person).

75 Vasey Esplanade, Trinity Beach. ✆ **07/4057 8855.** Main courses A$13–A$29 (US$10–US$23); pizzas A$15–A$20 (US$12–US$16). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily noon–late.

### Worth a Splurge

**Far Horizons** MODERN AUSTRALIAN You can't quite sink your toes into the sand, but you are just yards from the beach at this pleasant restaurant in the Angsana Resort. The laid-back fine-dining fare includes plenty of fresh seafood—the catch of the day comes with chunky homemade fries and tartar sauce, and there are interesting choices like Vietnamese salad with char-grilled reef fish. The restaurant sometimes sets up tables on the lawn among the palm trees beside the beach. The service is relaxed and friendly, and the crowd is a mix of guests from this and other nearby resorts. On Friday and Saturday night, a guitarist plays in the cocktail bar.

In the Angsana Resort, 1 Veivers Rd. (southern end of Williams Esplanade), Palm Cove. ✆ **07/4055 3000.** Reservations recommended. Main courses A$24–A$29 (US$19–US$23). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 6:30pm–midnight (last orders at 9:30pm). Bus: 1, 1B, 1X, 2X, or N.

## WHAT TO SEE & DO IN & AROUND CAIRNS

Without a doubt, the top attraction in Cairns—apart from the Great Barrier Reef—is the Tjapukai Aboriginal Cultural Park (see below) For details on visiting the Reef from Cairns, see "Exploring the Great Barrier Reef," earlier in this chapter.

### LEARNING ABOUT ABORIGINAL CULTURE

**Tjapukai Aboriginal Cultural Park** ★★★ Whether you choose the day or night experience, the Tjapukai (pronounced jab-*oo*-guy) Aboriginal Cultural Park is one of the best chances you'll have to discover the history and culture of the Aborigines without going to Central Australia. American theater director Don Freeman and his French-Canadian dancer wife, Judy, founded the dance show in 1987, working with local Aborigines, including dancer and songwriter David Hudson. Today it is a sophisticated, award-winning attraction with an international reputation. Don and Judy are still involved, but the park is 51% owned by the Aborigines who work there.

Housed in a striking modern building that incorporates Aboriginal themes and colors, the Tjapukai experience needs at least 2 to 3 hours. Start in the Creation Theatre, where performers use the latest in illusion, theatrics, and technology to tell the story of the creation of the world according to the beliefs of Tjapukai people. Actors work with spectacular special effects and holographic images to illustrate the legends. The production is performed in the Tjapukai language, translated through headsets.

Move on through the Magic Space museum and gallery section of the complex to the History Theatre, where a 20-minute film relates the history of the Tjapukai people since the coming of white settlers 120 years ago.

Outside, a suspension bridge links the main building with a cultural village where you can try boomerang and spear throwing, fire-making and didgeridoo playing, and learn about bush foods and medicines. In the open-sided Dance Theatre, Aboriginal men and women perform dances incorporating ancient and modern steps. Shows and demonstrations are planned so visitors can move from one to another easily, without

missing anything. The complex also includes a restaurant and coffee shop. An arts and crafts gallery and shop stocks the work of Aboriginal artists and crafts workers.

**Tjapukai by Night** tours run daily from 7:30 to 10pm. They include interactive time in the Magic Space museum, a Creation Show performance, and an outdoor Serpent Circle—a new, interactive show featuring tap sticks for each guest to use, a join-in corroboree (an Aboriginal nighttime dance), and a dramatic ceremony involving fire and water. Following are a buffet dinner and dance show, and the chance to meet the Tjapukai dancers. The cost is A$96 (US$77) adults, A$48 (US$38) children, including transfers to and from Cairns accommodations.

Captain Cook Hwy. (beside the Skyrail terminal), Smithfield. ✆ **07/4042 9900.** Fax 07/4042 9990. www.tjapukai.com.au. Admission A$29 (US$23) adults, A$15 (US$12) children 4–14, A$73 (US$58) families. Ask about packages that include transfers, lunch, and a guided Magic Space tour, or Skyrail and/or Scenic Rail travel to and from Kuranda. Daily 9am–5pm. Closed Jan 1 and Dec 25. Bus: 1C or 1E. Book shuttle transfers from Cairns and northern beaches hotels (A$9.75/US$7.80 adults and A$4.90/US$3.90 children, one-way) through the park. Park is 15 min. north of Cairns and 15 min. south of Palm Cove.

## MORE ATTRACTIONS

Three kilometers (1¾ miles) northwest of Cairns in Edge Hill, are the **Flecker Botanic Gardens,** 94 Collins Ave. (✆ **07/4044 3398**). You can see the wetlands, which include beautiful ferns and orchids, by following the park's walking trails and inspect gardens illustrating Aboriginal plant use. Australia's Gondwana Inheritance garden is devoted to the history of plant evolution. Guided walks are run on weekdays at 1pm and cost A$11 (US$8.80) per adult (free for children). There is a cafe and a nice book/gift shop. The gardens are open Monday through Friday 7:30am to 5:30pm, and from 8:30am weekends. They are a 10-minute drive from the city, or take bus no. 1B.

### In Cairns

**Cairns Rainforest Dome** For some visitors to Cairns, exploring the rainforest and its wildlife doesn't even involve leaving the hotel, thanks to the city's newest attraction. Here, 200 animals—including a huge saltwater crocodile called Goliath—are housed in a 20m-high (66-ft.) glass dome on the rooftop of the Hotel Sofitel Reef Casino. You can get up close with koalas, lizards, kookaburras, frogs, *pademelons,* turtles, and snakes. There are regular wildlife presentations and free guided tours throughout the day.

In the Hotel Sofitel Reef Casino, 35–41 Wharf St., Cairns, QLD 4870. ✆ **07/4031 7250.** Fax 07/4031 5265. www.cairnsdome.com.au. Admission A$22 (US$18) adults, A$11 (US$8.80) children, A$55 (US$44) for families of 4. Daily 8am–6pm. Closed Dec 25.

**Cairns Regional Gallery** *Finds* Modern paintings, sculpture, computer installations, and other works by a changing array of Australian and international artists are on show at Cairns's premier gallery, including pieces by Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders from Australia's far north. One-hour tours, which you should book in advance, are run on Wednesdays and Fridays between 10am and noon, and on Fridays 2pm to 3:30pm, starting in the gallery foyer.

Shields St. (at Abbott St.). ✆ **07/4046 4800.** www.cairnsregionalgallery.com.au. Admission A$5 (US$4) adults, free for children under 16. Mon–Sat 10am–5pm; Sun and public holidays 1–5pm. Closed Good Friday, January 1, and December 25 and 26.

**Cairns Tropical Zoo** *Kids* Get a dose of your favorite Aussie wildlife here—some kind of talk or show takes place about every 15 or 30 minutes throughout the day, including koala cuddling (have your photo taken for an extra A$14/US$11), saltwater crocodile and lorikeet feedings, and cane toad racing. Lots of other animals are on

show, too, like kangaroos (which you can hand-feed for A$1/US80¢ a bag), emus, cassowaries, dingoes, and native birds in a walk-through aviary. The park also runs a nocturnal tour, during which you can see many of the more elusive creatures on show. To take the park's 3-hour Cairns Night Zoo tour (www.cairnsnightzoo.com), book by 4pm on the same day (Mon–Thurs and Sat), earlier if you want transfers. The evening starts at 7pm and includes a wildlife spotlighting walk, during which you can pat a koala and a possum and feed kangaroos; a stargazing interlude; a barbecue dinner with beer and wine, billy tea, and damper; and dancing to an Aussie bush band.

Captain Cook Hwy. (22km/14 miles north of the city center), Palm Cove. ✆ **07/4055 3669.** Fax 07/4059 1160. www.cairnstropicalzoo.com. Admission A$26 (US$21) adults, A$13 (US$10) children 4–15. Cairns Night Zoo experience A$85 (US$68) adults, A$43 (US$34) children 4–15 (more if you want transfers from Cairns or Port Douglas). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 8:30am–5pm. Closed Dec 25. Bus: 1B. Transfers from Cairns through Down Under Tours (✆ **07/4035 5566**) or from Port Douglas with Wildlife Discovery Tours (✆ **07/4099 6612**).

**Hartley's Crocodile Adventures** ★★ *Kids* Hartley's is the original Australian croc show, and after a move to a new location and a multimillion-dollar redevelopment in mid-2002, quite possibly the best. What makes it different from others is the fantastic natural setting—a 2-hectare (5-acre) lagoon surrounded by *melaluca* (paperbark) and bloodwood trees and home to 23 estuarine crocs. The best time to visit is for the 3pm "croc attack" show, when you can witness the saltwater crocodile "death roll" during the 45-minute performance. At 11am you can see these monsters get hand-fed or hear an eye-opening talk on the less aggressive freshwater crocodiles. There are tours of the croc farm at 10am and 1:30pm; at 2pm there is a snake show; and 4:30pm is koala-feeding time. Cassowaries are fed at 9:30am and 4:15pm. This attraction makes a good stop en route to Port Douglas.

Capt. Cook Hwy. (40km/24 miles north of Cairns; 25km/16 miles south of Port Douglas), Palm Cove. ✆ **07/4055 3576.** Fax 07/4059 1017. www.crocodileadventures.com. Admission (good for 3 days) A$26 (US$21) adults, A$13 (US$10) children 4–15, A$65 (US$52) families of 4. Daily 8:30am–5pm. Closed Dec 25. Transfers from Cairns available through Down Under Tours (✆ **07/4035 5577**) or from Cairns and Port Douglas through Wildlife Discovery Tours (✆ **07/4099 6612**).

**Royal Flying Doctor Visitors Centre** The Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS), the free aeromedical service that provides a "mantle of safety" for all Outback Australians, has a base in Cairns. Tours of the center start every 30 minutes from 9am to 4:30pm. You can also watch a film, attend a talk on how the service began, browse through memorabilia, and board a former RFDS plane. Allow about 45 minutes.

1 Junction St., Edge Hill. ✆ **07/4053 5687.** Admission A$5.50 (US$4.40) adults, A$2.75 (US$2.20) children, A$17 (US$14) families. Mon–Sat 8:30am–5pm. Closed Sun and public holidays. Bus: 6 or 6A.

## EXPLORING THE ISLANDS & BEACHES

You don't have to go all the way to the Outer Great Barrier Reef to snorkel and get a taste of island living off Cairns. Fitzroy and Green islands offer reef, beaches, rainforest tours, and watersports less than an hour from the city wharf. See "Where to Stay," earlier in this section, for details of the resort on Fitzroy Island.

**FITZROY ISLAND** Scenic Fitzroy Island, a rainforested national park 45 minutes from Cairns, offers good diving. You can rent windsurfers, catamarans, and canoes; hike to the mountaintop lighthouse; view coral from a glass-bottom boat or take a short boat trip from the island to snorkel it; take a beginner's or certified dive; and swim in the pool. A day trip can cost as little as the round-trip ferry fare, A$36 (US$29) for adults and A$18 (US$14) for kids 4 to 14. Departures from Cairns are

daily at 8:30, 10:30am, and 4pm, returning at 9:30am, 3, and 5pm. Make reservations through **Raging Thunder Adventures** (✆ **07/4030 7990;** www.ragingthunder.com.au). Raging Thunder also runs full-day guided sea kayak expeditions to Fitzroy Island. Sea kayak trips include 3 hours of kayaking, snorkeling gear, lunch on a deserted beach, and a rainforest walk to the lighthouse; they cost A$135 (US$108) per person from Cairns, and participants must be over 12. You can also stay on the island for as little as A$31 (US$25) per person per night in bunkhouse accommodations (see "Where to Stay," earlier in this chapter).

**GREEN ISLAND** This 15-hectare (37-acre) coral cay, surrounded by dazzling coral and marine life, is just 27km (17 miles) east of Cairns. You can rent snorkel gear, windsurfers, and paddle-skis; take glass-bottom-boat trips; go parasailing; take an introductory or certified dive; walk vine-forest trails; or laze on the beach. The beach is coral sand, so it's a little rough underfoot. Day visitors have access to one of Green Island Resort's pools, its main bar, casual or upscale restaurants, and lockers and showers. Ask the beach staff to recommend the best snorkeling spots. If you don't snorkel, it's worth the admission charge to see the display of clown fish, potato cod, and anemones at the little underwater observatory, despite its cloudy old viewing windows. The island has a small attraction called **Marineland Melanesia** (✆ **07/4051 4032**), where you can see old nautical artifacts, primitive art, a turtle and reef aquarium, and live crocodiles. Admission is A$11 (US$8.80) adults, A$5 (US$4) kids; croc shows are at 10:30am and 1:45pm.

**Great Adventures** (✆ **07/4044 9944;** www.greatadventures.com.au) and **Big Cat Green Island Reef Cruises** (✆ **07/4051 0444;** www.bigcat-cruises.com.au) run to Green Island from Cairns. A half-day trip with snorkel gear or a glass-bottom-boat cruise with Great Adventures costs A$58 (US$46), with full day trips starting at A$98 (US$78) from Cairns. Big Cat makes a day trip for A$58 (US$46). Big Cat's boat is slower, but you still get more than 5 hours on the island. Great Adventures also has transfer-only rates of A$50 (US$40), which also gives access to the island's day facilities. Both companies pick up from hotels in Cairns, the northern beaches, and Port Douglas for an extra cost; Big Cat also runs to the island direct from Palm Cove.

## A SIDE TRIP TO KURANDA

Few travelers visit Cairns without making a day trip to the mountain village of **Kuranda,** 34km (20 miles) west of Cairns near the Barron Gorge National Park. Although it's undeniably touristy, the cool mountain air and mist-wrapped rainforest refuse to be spoiled. The shopping in Kuranda—for leather, Australian wool sweaters, opals, crafts, and more—is a little more individual and unusual than in Cairns, and the cafes and restaurants are more atmospheric. The town is easily negotiated on foot, so pick up a visitors' guide and map at the Skyrail gondola station or train station (see below for how to get there) when you arrive.

**GETTING THERE** Getting to Kuranda is part of the fun. Some people drive the winding 25km (15-mile) mountain road, but the most popular routes are to chuff up the mountainside in a scenic train or to glide silently over the rainforest canopy in the world's longest gondola cableway, the Skyrail Rainforest Cableway.

The most popular way to get there is to go one-way on the Skyrail (mornings are best for photography) and the other way on the train.

**By Skyrail** The **Skyrail Rainforest Cableway** ★★★ (✆ **07/4038 1555;** www.skyrail.com.au) is a magnificent feat of engineering and one of Australia's top tourism

attractions. One of Skyrail's 114 six-person gondolas leaves every few seconds from the terminal in the northern Cairns suburb of Smithfield for the 7.5km (4½-mile) journey. The view of the coast as you ascend is so breathtaking that even those afraid of heights will find it worthwhile. As you rise over the foothills of the coastal range, watch the lush green of the rainforest take over beneath you. Looking back, you have spectacular views over Cairns and north towards Trinity Bay. On a clear day, you can see Green Island. There are two stops during the 90-minute trip, at Red Peak and Barron Falls. After about 10 minutes, you reach Red Peak. You are now 545m (1,788 ft.) above sea level, and massive kauri pines dominate the view. You must change gondolas at each station, so take the time to stroll around the boardwalks for the ground view of the rainforest. Guided walks start every 20 minutes.

At the Barron Falls station, built on the cleared site of an old construction camp for workers on the first hydroelectric power station on the Barron River in the 1930s, a rainforest information center has been established, and there are boardwalks to the lookouts for wonderful views of the Barron Gorge and Falls. From the Barron Falls station, the gondola travels over the thick rainforest of the range. It's easy to spot ferns and orchids and the brilliant blue butterflies of the region. As you reach the end of the trip, the gondola passes over the Barron River and across the Kuranda railway line into the station. A one-way ticket is A$35 (US$28) for adults, A$18 (US$14) for children 4 to 14, or A$88 (US$70) for families of 4; a round-trip ticket, including transfers from your Cairns or northern beaches hotel, is A$68 (US$54) for adults, A$34 (US$27) for children, A$170 (US$136) for families; from Port Douglas, it's A$82 (US$66) for adults, A$41 (US$33) for children, A$205 (US$164) for families. You must make a reservation to travel within a 15-minute time frame. Don't worry if it rains on the day you go—one of the best trips I've made on Skyrail was in a misty rain, which added a new dimension to the rainforest. The cableway operates daily from 8:30am to 5:30pm (except Dec 25), with the last boarding at the Cairns end at 4:15pm. The Skyrail terminal is on the Captain Cook Highway at Kamerunga Road, Caravonica Lakes, 15km (9½ miles) north of Cairns' city center.

**By Scenic Railway** The 34km (21-mile) **Kuranda Scenic Railway** (✆ **07/4036 9249;** www.traveltrain.com.au) is one of the most scenic rail journeys in the world. The train snakes through the magnificent vistas of the Barron Gorge National Park, past gorges and waterfalls on the 90-minute trip from Cairns to Kuranda. It rises 328m (1,076 ft.) and goes through 15 tunnels before emerging at the pretty Kuranda station, which is smothered in ferns. Built by hand over 5 years in the late 1880s, the railway track is today a monument to the 1,500 men who toiled to link the two towns, and the ride on the steam train adds to the atmosphere. The train departs Cairns Central daily at 8:30 and 9:30am Sunday through Friday (except Dec 25), and leaves Kuranda daily at 2 and 3:30pm Sunday through Friday. The one-way fare is A$35 (US$28) for adults, A$18 (US$14) for children 4 to 16.

**Skyrail/Train Combination Tickets** In most cases, these packages represent convenience rather than savings. A package combining one-way travel on the Skyrail and a trip back on the Scenic Railway is A$70 (US$56) for adults and A$35 (US$28) for children; A$88 (US$70) for adults and A$44 (US$35) for kids with round-trip transfers from Cairns or the northern beaches. Skyrail runs a shuttle bus from most Cairns hotels. A package including the Skyrail, the Scenic Railway, and admission to the Tjapukai Aboriginal Cultural Park (see above) is A$99 (US$79) for adults, A$50 (US$40) for kids, and A$248 (US$198) for families of four; or A$117 (US$94) for

adults, A$59 (US$47) for kids, and A$293 (US$234) for families, including transfers from Cairns, the northern beaches, or Palm Cove. An option including the Skyrail, Scenic Railway, and Rainforestation (see below) is A$110 (US$88) for adults, A$55 (US$44) for kids. Book packages through Skyrail, Queensland Rail, or Tjapukai.

**By Bus** The cheapest way, by far, to reach Kuranda is by bus. **Whitecar Coaches** (✆ **07/4091 1855**) operates several daily bus services to Kuranda departing from 46 Spence St., Cairns. The fare is just A$4 (US$3.20) per person.

## BROWSING KURANDA'S MARKETS

Kuranda is known for its markets that sell local arts and crafts, fresh produce, boomerangs, T-shirts, and jewelry. There are two—the small "original" markets at 7 Therwine St., behind Kuranda Market Arcade (open Wed–Fri and Sun), which mainly sell cheap imports; and the 90-stall Heritage markets (open daily 9am–3pm), which offer better quality and a wider variety. Try to visit when both markets are open.

Even the Heritage markets have been invaded by imported products, and in response, a group of about 50 local artisans sell their work in the **Kuranda Arts Co-Operative** ★, (✆ **07/4093 9026**) at Shop 6, "The Settlement," Rob Veivers Drive, next to the Butterfly Sanctuary. It's open from 10am to 4pm daily. You will find quality furniture crafted from recycled Australian hardwoods, jewelry, handicrafts, and all kinds of stuff here.

## SOAKING UP THE RAINFOREST SCENERY

You can explore the rainforest, the river esplanade, or Barron Falls along a number of easy walking trails. If you want to learn about the rainforest, explore it with Brian Clarke of **Kuranda Riverboat Tours** (✆ **07/4093 7476,** or 0412/159 212 mobile), who runs informative 45-minute river cruises. The cruises depart hourly from 10:30am to 2:30pm from the riverside landing across the railway footbridge near the train station. Brian is a former crocodile hunter and has lived in the rainforest for more than 30 years. The cruise costs A$12 (US$9.60) for adults, A$6 (US$4.80) for children 5 to 15, and A$30 (US$24) for families of four. Buy your tickets on board.

## KURANDA'S NATURE PARKS & OTHER ATTRACTIONS

Of Kuranda's two walk-through aviaries, **Birdworld** (✆ **07/4093 9188**), behind the Heritage markets off Rob Veivers Drive, is the most interesting; it has eye-catching macaws, a pair of cassowaries, and Australia's largest collection of free-flying birds. **The Aviary,** 8 Thongon St. (✆ **07/4093 7411**), is good if you want to see a bigger range of Australian species. Birdworld is open daily from 9am to 4pm; admission is A$12 (US$9.60) for adults, A$5 (US$4) for children 4 to 14, and A$29 (US$23) for families. The Aviary is open daily from 10am to 3:30pm; admission is A$12 (US$9.60) for adults, A$6 (US$4.80) for kids 4 to 16. Both are closed December 25.

**Australian Butterfly Sanctuary** ★ *Kids* A rainbow-hued array of 1,500 tropical butterflies—including the electric blue Ulysses and Australia's largest species, the Cairns bird wing—occupies a lush walk-through enclosure here. Take the free guided tour and learn about the butterfly's fascinating life cycle. The butterflies will land on you if you wear pink, red, and other bright colors, and don't be put off if it's raining—this attraction is good in any weather.

8 Rob Veivers Dr. ✆ **07/4093 7575.** Fax 07/4093 8923. www.australianbutterflies.com. Admission A$13 (US$10) adults, A$12 (US$9.60) seniors, A$6.50 (US$5.20) children 4–15, A$30 (US$24) families. Daily 9:45am–4pm. Free guided tours every 15 min. from 10am–3:15pm. Closed Dec 25. Bus stop 7 min. from sanctuary.

### Tips Wildlife-Viewing Tip

Many people on rainforest tours end up asking "Where are all the animals?" If you want to spot wildlife, be careful which tour you pick. To avoid contact with humans, animals are increasingly retreating to higher altitudes; but many tour operators in the Daintree and Cape Tribulation national parks stick to the lowlands. Before you sign up, find out where the tour plans to take you.

**Rainforestation Nature Park** At this 40-hectare (99-acre) nature and cultural complex, you can take a 45-minute ride into the rainforest in a World War II amphibious Army Duck. You'll hear commentary on orchids and other rainforest wildlife along the way. You can also see a performance by Aboriginal dancers, learn about Aboriginal legends and throw a boomerang on the Dreamtime Walk, or have your photo taken cuddling a koala. You can do any of these activities separately or do them all (except cuddle a koala) in a package that costs A$34 (US$27) for adults, A$17 (US$14) for kids 4 to 14, or A$85 (US$68) for families of four. Koala photos are A$12 (US$9.60). The Army Duck runs on the hour beginning at 9am; the Aboriginal dancers perform at 10:30am, noon, and 2pm; and the 30-minute Dreamtime Walk leaves at 10, 11, 11:30am, noon, 12:30, 1:30, and 2:30pm.

Kennedy Hwy., a 5-min. drive from the center of Kuranda. ✆ **07/4085 5008.** Fax 07/4093 7578. www.rainforest.com.au. Shuttle from the Butterfly Sanctuary, Rob Veivers Dr., Kuranda, every 30 min. 10:45am–2:45pm for A$6 (US$4.80) adults, A$3 (US$2.40) children 4 to 14, A$15 (US$12) families, round-trip. AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 9am–4pm. Closed Dec 25.

## EXPLORING THE WET TROPICS

The 110-million-year-old World Heritage–listed Daintree Rainforest, 2 hours north of Cairns, gets most of the attention (and is covered below), but tracts of rainforest closer to Cairns are just as pristine. These are all part of the **Wet Tropics** that stretch from Cape Tribulation to Townsville. This dense, lush environment has remained unchanged by ice ages and other geological events, and the plants and animals here retain primitive characteristics. Within the tract's mangroves, eucalyptus, and tropical rainforest are 65% of Australia's bird species, 60% of its butterfly species, and many of its frogs, reptiles, bats, marsupials, and orchids.

Because so much rainforest wildlife is nocturnal and often difficult to spot, consider joining **Wait-a-While Rainforest Tours** (✆ **07/4098 2422;** www.waitawhile.com.au) on one of their small group tours into Daintree and Cape Tribulation national parks. Naturalist guides take you into the forest to spot a range of wildlife: musky-rat kangaroos, platypuses, ringtail possums, cassowaries, amethystine pythons, birds, and tree frogs. The night tour costs A$99 (US$79) for adults or A$89 (US$71) for children ages 7 to 14 (children must be at least 7 to go on tour) from Cairns and is designed to maximize your encounters with the wild things. It begins at 6pm and finishes at about midnight. It uses only low-watt bulbs and quiet 4WD or off-road vehicles. A day-into-night tour leaves Cairns at noon and returns around 11:30pm. This trip costs A$121 (US$97) for adults, A$99 (US$79) for children ages 4 to 14, or A$363 (US$290) for families of four. It includes afternoon tea, binoculars, flashlights, reference books, National Park permits, dinner in a country restaurant, and a Daintree River cruise for croc spotting.

## WHITE-WATER RAFTING & OTHER THRILLS

**RnR Rafting** ★ (✆ **07/4041 9444;** www.raft.com.au) and **Raging Thunder Adventures** (✆ **07/4030 7990;** www.ragingthunder.com.au) serve as one-stop booking shops for action pursuits in and around Cairns, including hot-air ballooning, skydiving, jet-boating, horseback riding, ATV (all-terrain vehicle) safaris, parasailing, and rafting. Ask about multipursuit packages.

**BIKING** **Dan's Mountain Biking** (✆ **07/4032 0666,** or 0419/930 128 mobile) runs a wide range of full- and half-day guided tours in small groups for A$75 to A$135 (US$60–US$108) per person.

**BUNGEE JUMPING** Contact **A. J. Hackett Bungy** (✆ **1800/622 888** in Australia, or 07/4057 7188). The cost is A$128 (US$102) per person including transport to the site, which is 20 minutes north of town on McGregor Road.

**FISHING** Cairns is the world's giant black marlin capital. Catches of more than 1,000 pounds hardly raise an eyebrow in this neck of the woods. The game-fishing season is September through December, with November the busiest. Book early—game boats are reserved months in advance. Game fishers can also battle Pacific sailfish, dogtooth and yellowfin tuna, Spanish mackerel, wahoo, dolphin fish, barracuda, and tiger shark. Reef anglers can expect to land coral trout, red emperor (sea perch), and sweetlip. Mangrove jack, barramundi, and tarpon lurk in the estuaries. Check out www.fishingcairns.com.au or contact **Destination Cairns Marketing,** 36 Aplin St. (at Sheridan St.) (✆ **1800/807 730** in Australia, or 07/4051 4066), to book a charter. Expect to pay around A$400 (US$320) per person or about A$1,900 (US$1,520) per day for a sole charter for heavy-tackle game fishing, A$350 (US$280) per person for light tackle fishing, at least A$155 (US$124) for reef fishing, and A$135 (US$108) for a day or A$75 (US$60) for a half-day in the Cairns Inlet estuary.

**WHITE-WATER RAFTING** Several companies offer exciting white-water-rafting trips from Cairns on the Class III to IV **Tully River** ★★, 90 minutes south of Cairns near Mission Beach; the Class III Barron River in the hills behind the city; and the Class IV to V rapids of the inland Johnstone River. One of the best is **RnR Rafting** (✆ **07/4041 9444;** www.raft.com.au).

One-day trips on the Tully are the most popular (see "Mission Beach: The Cassowary Coast," later in this chapter). The trip costs A$150 (US$120) per person from Cairns, or A$170 (US$136) from Port Douglas, including transfers.

Closer to Cairns, the gentler **Barron River** is a good choice for the timid. A half-day trip with RnR Rafting costs about A$88 (US$70) per person from Cairns or A$99 (US$79) from Port Douglas, including pickup from your accommodations and 2 hours of rafting. Prices do not include the A$6 (US$4.80) national park fee.

### *Tips* The Secret of the Seasons

High season in Cairns runs from early July to early October; 2-week school vacations around Easter, mid-July, and in late September; and the Christmas holiday through January. Hotel occupancy is high in those periods, so book ahead. During the low season, from November to June, ask about discounted rates. Many hotels will be willing to negotiate. Standby rates are usually easy to come by then, too.

## Where's the Beach?

That may have been the question visitors to Cairns once asked, but a man-made lagoon right on the Cairns Esplanade answers it swiftly. Swaying palms and sandy white beaches—the stuff of postcards—are now part of the streetscape, but if you want the real thing (and are visiting out of stinger season), it's only a few minutes' drive north of the city center.

Heading north from Cairns, you'll come to Machans, Holloways, Yorkeys Knob, Trinity, Kewarra, Clifton, Palm Cove, and Ellis, in that order.

The locals have kept quiet about these beautiful spots for years. At Machans Beach, about 10km (6 miles) north of Cairns airport, the esplanade is lined with private homes. The closest commercial beachfront accommodations north of Cairns are at Holloways Beach.

**Holloways,** like most of the beaches along the Marlin Coast, is patrolled and has a swimming enclosure for use during stinger season (Oct–May). There's playground equipment for the kids in the beachfront park, while parents can watch from the shady deck at the beachfront cafe.

At **Yorkeys Knob,** apartment blocks line Sims Esplanade, across the road from beachside picnic shelters and the lifeguard post; Yorkeys Knob also has a golf course and marina. **The Half Moon Bay Country Club Golf Course** is off Wattle Street, and is well signposted from the main road into town.

**Trinity Beach,** one of the most popular of the northern beaches, is a 1.5km (just under 1 mile) stretch of sand, complete with swaying coconut palms. **Vasey Esplanade** is a colorful, bustling mix of apartments, restaurants, shops, and holidaymakers. On the beach, you can rent a jet-ski, catamaran, paddle-ski, windsurfer, or boogie board, or join an impromptu game of beach volleyball. At the southern end of the beach, take the **Ron McKauge Walk** for 350m (1,150 ft.) along the beach and around the point for spectacular views north over Trinity Beach and south to Yorkeys Knob marina. On the hill above Trinity Beach is the old pub, with million-dollar views of the beach and Coral Sea.

Next is **Kewarra Beach,** home to a budget-busting luxury resort well hidden from the beach itself. From Kewarra, you can see all the way to Palm Cove. To walk there along the beach takes you past Clifton Beach.

**Palm Cove** has a long jetty for fishing or boarding one of the day-tripper boats that pull in. Melaleuca trees line **Williams Esplanade,** softening the row of hotels and apartments. Here, nothing can be built higher than the trees.

Absolute beachfront means just that at **Ellis Beach,** the most northerly, just 30 minutes from Cairns. This is one of the most unspoiled stretches of the coast, a 5km (3-mile) beach, fringed by 150 palms and dotted with mango trees.

## 3 Port Douglas, Daintree & the Cape Tribulation Area

Port Douglas 67km (40 miles) N of Cairns; Mossman 19km (11 miles) N of Port Douglas; Daintree 49km (29 miles) N of Port Douglas; Cape Tribulation 34km (20 miles) N of Daintree

The tiny fishing village of **Port Douglas** ★ is where "the rainforest meets the reef." The Daintree Rainforest and the Great Barrier Reef, two great wonders of the natural world, are right next to each other. Just over an hour's drive from Cairns, through rainforest and along the sea, Port Douglas may be a one-horse town, but its main street is lined with stylish shops and trendy restaurants, and its beautiful **Four Mile Beach** ★★ is not to be missed. This is a favorite spot with celebrities big and small—you may find yourself dining at a table next to anyone from Bill Clinton to Kylie Minogue, Sean Penn to Australian rock band Midnight Oil, or minor soap stars.

People often base themselves in "Port," as the locals call it, because they like the peaceful rural surroundings, the uncrowded beach, and the charmed absence of tacky development (so far, anyway). Don't think you will be isolated if you stay here—many reef and rainforest tours originate in Port Douglas, and many of the tours discussed in the "Cairns" section, earlier in this chapter, pick up from Port Douglas.

Daintree National Park lies just north of Port Douglas; just north of that is Cape Tribulation National Park, another wild rainforest with hilly headlands down to the sea. Exploring these national parks is easy on a 4WD day safari from Port Douglas.

### ESSENTIALS

**GETTING THERE** Port Douglas is a scenic 65-minute drive from Cairns, in part along a narrow winding road that skirts the coast. Take Sheridan Street north out of the city, as it becomes the Captain Cook Highway; stay on the highway and follow the signs to Mossman and Mareeba until you reach the Port Douglas turnoff on your right.

One of the most pleasant ways to get to Port Douglas is to take one of **Quicksilver Connections'** ★ (✆ **07/4087 2100;** www.quicksilver-cruises.com) Wavepiercer catamarans along the coast. They depart Reef Fleet Terminal in Cairns at 8am and Palm Cove jetty at 8:30am, and arrive in Port Douglas at 9:30am. You can also stay onboard and go straight to the Great Barrier Reef for the day for an extra charge (see "Discovering the Great Barrier Reef," below). The cost of the trip from Cairns is A$26 (US$21) one-way, A$39 (US$31) round-trip; half-price for kids 4 to 14.

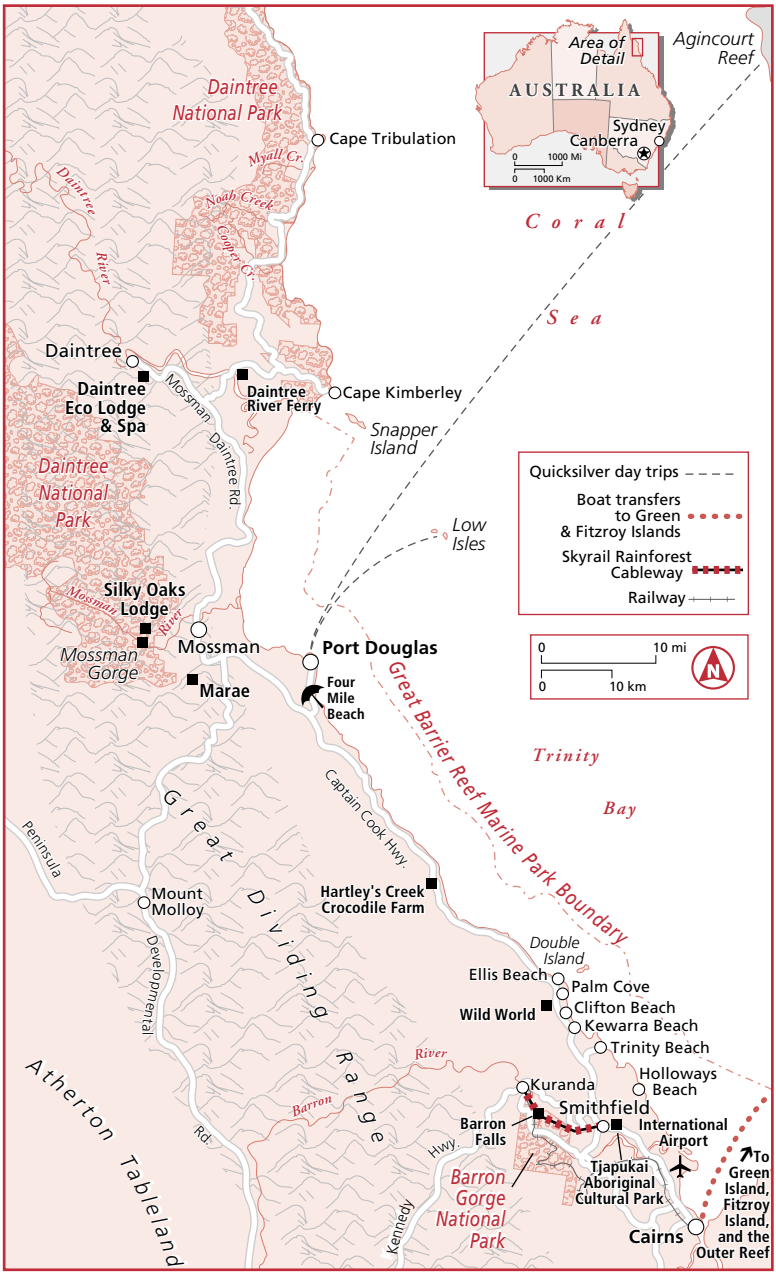
A one-way ticket on **Sun Palm Express Coaches** (✆ **07/4084 2626**) to Port Douglas is A$25 (US$20) from the Cairns airport, half-price for children 3 to 14.

**VISITOR INFORMATION** Contact the **Port Douglas Daintree Tourism Association,** P.O. Box 511, Port Douglas, QLD 4877 (✆ **07/4099 4588;** www.pddt.com.au). The association has no visitor information office in Port Douglas. Instead, visitors should stop into a private tour booking center in town. One of the biggest and most centrally located is the **Port Douglas Tourist Information Centre,** 23 Macrossan St. (✆ **07/4099 5599**), open daily from 7:30am to 6pm.

**GETTING AROUND** Of the major rental companies, **Avis** (✆ **07/4099 4331**) and **Thrifty** (✆ **07/4099 5555**) have offices in Port Douglas. Check out the local companies, including **Port Douglas Car Rental** (✆ **07/4099 4988**). All rent regular vehicles as well as four-wheel-drives, which you need if you plan to drive to Cape Tribulation. For a taxi, call **Port Douglas Taxis** (✆ **07/4084 2600**).

A good way to get around the town's flat streets is by bike. **Bike 'n' Hike,** 40 Macrossan St. (✆ **07/4099 4000**), is open daily from 8am to 6pm or later and rents

# Port Douglas, Daintree & Cape Tribulation



a large range of good mountain bikes; prices start at A$11 (US$8.80) for a half-day, A$17 (US$14) for a full day. **Port Douglas Bike Hire,** at the corner of Warner and Wharf streets (✆ **07/4099 5799**), rents bikes for A$10 (US$8) for a half-day, A$14 (US$11) for a full day. It's open daily 9am to 5pm.

## WHERE TO STAY

Although there are plenty of ritzy hotels and resorts in Port Douglas, you can find good, inexpensive places. Many of the value-for-money choices are holiday apartments with kitchens (you can save money on meals). Booking agent **Port Douglas Accommodation** (✆ **1800/645 566** in Australia, or 07/4099 4488; fax 07/4099 4455; www.portdouglasaccom.com.au) represents several affordable apartments.

**Archipelago Studio Apartments** ★ You won't find a friendlier or more convenient place to stay in Port Douglas than these apartments, 10 seconds from the beach and less than 10 minutes' walk from town. Hosts Wolfgang Klein and Christel Bader are eager to help with tour bookings and to give advice—and they also speak fluent German, conversational French, and some Spanish. The apartments are on the small side (most suit only three people, at the most), but all are well cared for. You can opt for a tiny Garden apartment with a patio; Balcony and Seaview apartments are a bit larger and have private balconies. Seaview apartments are quite roomy and have side views of Four Mile Beach. Towels are changed daily and linen weekly, but general housekeeping service will cost A$20 (US$16) extra. There's no elevator and no porter, so be prepared to carry your luggage upstairs.

72 Macrossan St., Port Douglas, QLD 4877. ✆ **07/4099 5387.** Fax 07/4099 4847. www.archipelago.com.au. 21 units (all with shower only). High season (June–Oct) A$120–A$205 (US$96–A$164) double; low season A$105–A$175 (US$84–US$140) double. Additional person A$20 (US$16). 3-night minimum. MC, V. Free covered parking. Children under 6 not accepted. **Amenities:** Outdoor saltwater pool; nearby golf course; 6 nearby lit tennis courts; access to nearby health club; Jacuzzi; tour desk; coin-op laundry; laundry service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, kitchenette, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer.

**Comfort Inn Port Douglas** This neat little motel, part of the Comfort Inn chain, is just a 10-minute stroll from town. Rooms are good-size and kept spick-and-span. The bathrooms are a little old but have plenty of counter space and nice thick towels. Hair dryers are available from the front desk. The motel's spacious and hip Italian restaurant is popular with locals. The pool is lovely but not very private. Four Mile Beach is a short stroll away (in stinger season, it's about a 20-min. walk to the stinger net).

123 Davidson St., Port Douglas, QLD 4871. ✆ **07/4099 5266.** Fax 07/4099 5821. www.comfortinnportdouglas.com.au. 17 units. High season A$125 (US$100) double; low season A$105 (US$84) double. Extra adult A$15 (US$12), extra child 3–12 A$5 (US$4). Cribs A$5 (US$4). AE, DC, MC, V. Free covered parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor pool; tour desk; room service (breakfast only); coin-op laundry. *In room:* A/C, TV, kitchenette, minibar, iron.

**Port Douglas Beachfront Terrace** *Value* The best-value beachfront accommodations in town, especially in low season, may be these clean, quiet units in this low-rise complex on Four Mile Beach, a short walk from town. The apartments are airy and

### *Tips* Beware the Sting(ers)

Deadly marine stingers (jellyfish) infest the water from October to May; swim only in areas partitioned off by stinger nets during those months.

respectably furnished with an open-plan kitchen (some with dishwashers), tiny but up-to-date bathrooms, cool tile floors, and balconies. All are serviced weekly. Room no. 4 has a garden patio as well as sea views. The roomier penthouses (nos. 11 and 14) have rooftop living areas overlooking the sea and larger bathrooms. If you don't mind missing a view, the two-bedroom units in the gardens at the rear are a little darker but also cheaper and nice enough with cane furniture and a patio or balcony.

17 The Esplanade, Port Douglas, QLD 4871. ✆ **1800/621 195** in Australia, or 07/4099 5397. Fax 07/4099 5206. www.portdouglasbeachfront.com.au. 17 units (some with shower only). High season (June–Oct and Dec 18–Jan 14) A$225 (US$180) 1-bedroom beachfront apt; A$275 (US$220) 2-bedroom beachfront apt and 2-bedroom penthouse; A$180 (US$144) 2-bedroom garden apt. Low season A$160 (US$128) 1-bedroom beachfront apt; A$180 (US$144) 2-bedroom beachfront apt and 2-bedroom penthouse; A$130 (US$104) 2-bedroom garden apt. Extra person A$30 (US$24). Cribs A$8 (US$6.40). AE, DC, MC, V. Free covered parking. Transfers from Cairns airport are A$26 (US$21) adults, A$16 (US$13) children 4–14 each way. **Amenities:** Outdoor saltwater pool; tennis court; bike rental; tour desk. *In room:* A/C, TV, VCR, kitchen, hair dryer, iron, laundry.

**Port O'Call Lodge** There's a nice communal feeling to this modest motel on a suburban street a 10-minute walk from town. Backpackers, families, and travelers on a budget seem to treat it like a second home, swapping stories as they cook a meal in the communal kitchen and dining room. The rooms are light, cool, and fresh with tile floors, loads of luggage and bench space, and small patios. The compact bathrooms are efficiently laid out with old but neat fixtures (bring your own hair dryer). Double rooms have a TV, clock radio, self-serve tea and coffee facilities, and minifridge. The hostel rooms have private bathrooms and no more than five beds or bunks in each. A 24-bed bunkhouse has facilities for travelers with disabilities. New double and quad rooms were added in 2004. At night the lively poolside Port O'Call Bistro is the place to be. Other features include free board games, a pay phone, Internet access, and a kiosk selling refreshments.

Port St. (at Craven Close), Port Douglas, QLD 4877. ✆ **1800/892 800** in Australia, or 07/4099 5422. Fax 07/4099 5495. www.portocall.com.au. 28 units (all with shower only). High season (Easter, May–Oct, Dec 25) A$59–A$109 (US$47–US$87) double; low season A$59–A$89 (US$47–US$71) double. Extra person A$15 (US$12). Hostel quad rooms A$27 (US$22) YHA/Hostelling International members, A$28 (US$22) nonmembers; bunkhouse A$22 (US$18) YHA/Hostelling International members, A$23 (US$18) nonmembers. Children under 3 stay free. MC, V. Free parking. Free once-daily shuttle to and from Cairns and the airport Mon–Sat. Bus: 1X (stop at front door). **Amenities:** Restaurant (see "Where to Dine in Port Douglas," below); outdoor pool; 3 golf courses nearby; access to nearby health club; bike rental; tour desk; coin-op laundry; nonsmoking rooms; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge (in some), safe.

## A LUXURY B&B HIDEAWAY IN THE COUNTRY

**Marae** ★★ John and Pam Burden's architecturally stunning timber home, on a hillside 15km (9½ miles) north of Port Douglas, is a glamorous and restful retreat. The rustic-meets-sleek contemporary bedrooms have white mosquito nets and smart linens on king-size beds, and elegant bathrooms. The garden room opens onto a plunge pool overlooking the valley, and there is also a lap pool. Wallabies and bandicoots (small marsupials) feed in the garden, kingfishers and honeyeaters use the pools, and butterflies are everywhere. A delicious tropical breakfast is served on the west deck in the company of a flock of red-browed finches and peaceful doves. Afterward you can wander the rainforest trails of Mossman Gorge, just a few miles away.

Lot 1, Chook's Ridge, Shannonvale (P.O. Box 133, Port Douglas, QLD 4877). ✆ **07/4098 4900.** Fax 07/4098 4099. www.marae.com.au. 3 units (2 with shower only). A$100 (US$80) single; A$150 (US$120) double. 2-night minimum. Rates include full breakfast. MC, V. Covered parking. From Port Douglas, take Captain Cook Hwy. toward Mossman for 10km (6¼ miles), go left onto Mt. Molloy turnoff for 1km (½ mile), then right onto Ponzo Rd. for 2km (1¼ miles); Chook's Ridge is on your left. Children under 13 not accepted. **Amenities:** Outdoor lap and plunge pools; nearby golf courses; tour desk; laundry service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer.

### Value Camp Your Way Around Queensland

Another accommodations option is camping. You will find campsites and air-conditioned self-contained park cabins at many locations around the state. Check the **Caravan Parks Association of Queensland website** (www.caravanqld.com.au) for a list of accredited parks.

## WHERE TO DINE IN PORT DOUGLAS

A good place to chill out by the water over an inexpensive meal is the **Port Douglas & District Combined Clubs,** 7 Ashford St. (✆ **07/4099 5553**). It's a humble corrugated iron shed with pool tables and slot machines, but the food is remarkably good, and it's got the same water views of Dickson Inlet as the pricier On the Inlet (see below). It's open daily 10am to 10pm, for meals 12:30 to 2pm and 5:30 to 8:30pm.

**Court House Hotel** PUB GRUB Since 1879 this lovely old pub has been a favorite with locals and visitors alike. A few years ago, it was painstakingly renovated and revamped. One thing that hasn't changed is the central location with a stunning outlook over the Coral Sea. From the veranda of the upstairs Sunset Bar, you can watch the spectacular sunsets and enjoy fantastic cocktails. Great-value pub/bistro meals are available from 11:30am till late, and there's live entertainment on the weekends in the courtyard, which boasts a magnificent giant mango tree.

Macrossan St. (at Wharf St.). ✆ **07/4099 5181.** Main courses A$15–A$20 (US$12–US$16). AE, DC, MC, V. Bar daily 10am–midnight; bistro daily 11:30am–2pm and 5:30–9pm.

**On the Inlet** SEAFOOD No-nonsense seafood and a no-fuss atmosphere make this waterside venue popular with the locals. Relax in high-backed cane chairs on a shady timber deck with nice views, or kick back over a long lunch, which might include chile salt calamari on *shinyo* noodle salad, followed by a seafood linguini. Or try the seared scallops for an appetizer and a wonderful wild barramundi for a main course. Happy Hour from 3:30 to 5:30pm every day features specials such as a "bucket of prawns" or plate of oysters with beer or wine for just A$17 (US$14), and you can watch stingrays and groupers feed below. A take-out section up front serves fish and chips. The restaurant doubles as a seafood wholesaler, so you know it's fresh.

3 Inlet St. ✆ **07/4099 5255.** Reservations recommended. Main courses A$16–A$25 (US$13–US$20). AE, MC, V. Daily noon–3pm and 5:30pm–late.

**Port O'Call Bistro** Kids CAFE/BISTRO Locals patronize this poolside bistro and bar at the Port O'Call Lodge (p. 297) almost as often as guests do because it offers good, honest food like lamb shanks and steaks in hearty portions at painless prices. The atmosphere is fun and friendly. There are pasta, curry, and roast nights, and every night you can try one of the chef's blackboard surprises, including local beef and seafood. There are kids' meals as well as burgers, nachos, and pastas to appeal to everyone.

In the Port O'Call Lodge, Port St. (at Craven Close). ✆ **07/4099 5422.** Main courses A$12–A$20 (US$9.60–US$16). MC, V. Daily 6pm–midnight.

**Salsa Bar & Grill** ★★ Kids MODERN/TROPICAL This trendy restaurant, in a timber Queenslander with wraparound verandas, has terrific food, great prices, and lively, fun service. You can choose simple fare such as gnocchi, Caesar salad, or fantastic spring rolls, or such mouthwatering delights as whitebait and crab fritters with

wasabi aioli, *wakame* and beetroot salad; or pan-fried barramundi with tagliatelle, tomato vinaigrette, corn, and prosciutto salsa. Even if you usually resist dessert, don't. The buttermilk and almond nougat *panna cotta* is to die for, and the chocolate Cointreau soufflé is a must. On Sunday, a salsa band plays and the place really jumps!

26 Wharf St. (at Warner St.). ✆ **07/4099 4922.** www.salsa-port-douglas.com.au. Reservations required. Main courses A$20–A$25 (US$16–US$20). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Sat 10am–midnight; Sun 8am–midnight.

### WORTH A SPLURGE

**Nautilus** ★★ TROPICAL/SEAFOOD Bill and Hillary Clinton dined here during a visit Down Under, and by all accounts loved it. So did I. The restaurant, which has been keeping the locals happy since 1953, is set under the palm trees and stars, with a clever seating plan and unusual high-backed chairs that create a wonderfully intimate atmosphere. Local produce and seafood are the mainstays of the menu, which features such delights as deep-fried whole coral trout served with green *paw paw* and bean shoot salad; and Gulf mud crab, wok-steamed in Tom Yum coconut sauce with vanilla and coconut jasmine rice. Or you may prefer oven-roasted Peking style duck, slow-roasted lamb rack, or one of the many other non-seafood choices.

17 Murphy St. (entry also from Macrossan St.), Port Douglas. ✆ **07/4099 5330.** www.nautilus-restaurant.com.au. Reservations recommended. Main courses A$38–A$45 (US$30–US$36). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 5:30–10:30pm or until the last diners leave. Closed Feb. Children under 8 not accepted.

## WHAT TO SEE & DO

**DISCOVERING THE GREAT BARRIER REEF** For details on diving and snorkeling the outer Great Barrier Reef from Port Douglas, see section 1, "Exploring the Great Barrier Reef," earlier in this chapter.

Another way to spend a day on the Great Barrier Reef, closer to shore, is to visit the **Low Isles** 15km (9 miles) northeast of Port Douglas. There is nothing to the isles—just 1.5-hectare (3¾-acre) coral cay specks of lush vegetation surrounded by white sand and 22 hectares (55 acres) of coral—which is what makes them so appealing.

The trip aboard the 30m (98-ft.) luxury sailing catamaran ***Wavedancer*** (✆ **07/4087 2100;** www.quicksilver-cruises.com), operated by Quicksilver, is A$124 (US$99) for adults, A$65 (US$52) for kids 4 to 14, and A$313 (US$250) for families. You have the option of making an introductory scuba dive for an extra A$106 (US$85) per person (must be at least 12 years old). The *Wavepiercer* departs Reef Fleet Terminal in Cairns at 8am and Palm Cove Jetty on the northern beaches at 8:30am to connect with *Wavedancer,* which departs from Port Douglas at 10am. Prices include hotel pickup.

Snorkeling specialist boat ***Wavelength*** (✆ **07/4099 5031;** www.wavelength.com.au) does a full-day trip to the Outer Reef for A$155 (US$124) for adults, A$105 (US$84) for children 2 to 12, A$465 (US$372) for families of four. The trip visits three different snorkel sites each day and incorporates a guided snorkel tour and a reef presentation by

### Tips Port Douglas After Dark

Locals meet at the 120-year-old **Court House Hotel** (✆ **07/ 4099 5181**) at the west end of Macrossan Street at Wharf Street. Live bands play Monday, Friday, and Saturday nights and Sunday afternoon. The pub is open daily 10am until midnight (until 9pm Sun).

a marine biologist. It carries up to 30 passengers and includes snorkel gear, sunsuits, lunch, and transfers from your hotel. Both beginners and experienced snorkelers will like this trip. It departs daily at 8:15am from the Wavelength jetty, Wharf Street.

**EXPLORING DAINTREE & CAPE TRIBULATION** Almost everyone who comes to Port Douglas takes a guided 4WD day trip into the Daintree and Cape Tribulation rainforests. Although they are referred to as two separate national parks, the forests that cover them merge into one.

You can rent a 4WD and explore on your own (that is the cheapest option if you're traveling in a group of two or more), but you won't understand much about what you are seeing unless you have a guide to interpret it for you. Most companies basically cover the same territory and sights, including a 1-hour Daintree River cruise to spot crocs, a visit to the lovely **Marrdja Botanical Walk,** a stroll along an isolated beach, lunch at a pretty spot somewhere in the forest, and a visit to Mossman Gorge. Some tours also go to the picturesque **Bloomfield Falls** in Cape Tribulation National Park. Expect to pay about A$130 (US$104) per adult and about A$90 (US$72) per child. Trips that include Bloomfield Falls cost more.

A company that provides an excellent, gently adventurous alternative is Pete Baxendell's **Heritage & Interpretive Tours** (✆ **07/4098 7897;** www.nqhit.com.au). On a daylong bushwalk into a tract of privately owned rainforest with Pete, a naturalist and professional tour guide, you taste green ants (be brave—it's quite an experience) and other native "bush tucker," discover how to rustle up a toothbrush from a shrub if you forgot to pack yours, learn about bush medicine and the wildlife around you, and clamber up a stream to a waterfall. He takes a maximum of six people at a time. Lunch and Port Douglas pickups are included in the price of A$110 (US$88) for adults and A$85 (US$68) for children. Walks run Tuesday and Saturday, leaving Port at 8:30am.

You can **charter** Pete and his 4WD on other days for bushwalks for A$175 (US$140) per person (minimum of two) or for a "go anywhere" adventure for A$590 (US$472) per day for a group of six. Pickups from the northern beaches cost A$45 (US$36) extra for bushwalks but are included in the price for "go anywhere" charters. The charter prices compare favorably with a regular Daintree four-wheel-drive tour if there are three or more of you—and you get a tailored itinerary, Pete's knowledge, and the vehicle all to yourself. He often takes customers inland to Outback gold-mining ghost towns or north to tiny Cooktown, which boasts an excellent museum devoted to Australia's "discoverer," Capt. James Cook. If you have 2 days, he can take you west to see Aboriginal rock art and stay at an upscale camp, or go to the Undara Lava Tubes.

Other established operators are **Trek North Safaris** (✆ **07/4051 4328**) and **BTS Tours** (✆ **07/4099 5665**). As is the case in most tourist hot spots, some tour operators battle fiercely to pay tour desks the highest commission to recommend their tours, even though those tours may not necessarily be the best for your needs. Take tour desks' recommendations with a grain of salt and ask other travelers for their recommendations. You may not see too much wildlife, as rainforest animals are shy, camouflaged, nocturnal, or all three! Most four-wheel-drive tours will pick you up in Port Douglas at no charge, although there is usually a small fee from Cairns and the northern beaches. Floods and swollen creeks can quash your plans to explore the Daintree in the Wet season (Dec–Mar or Apr), so keep your plans flexible.

If your chosen safari does not visit **Mossman Gorge,** 21km (12 miles) northwest of Port Douglas near the sugar town of Mossman, try to get there on your own. The

### *Moments* The Land That Time Forgot

The World Heritage–listed Daintree Rainforest has remained largely unchanged over the past 110 million years. It is home to rare plants that provide key links in the evolution story. In the 140,000-acre **Daintree National Park** you will find cycads, dinosaur trees, fan palms, giant strangler figs, and epiphytes like the basket fern, staghorn, and elkhorn. Nighttime croc-spotting tours on the river vie for popularity with early morning cruises to see the rich bird life. Pythons, lizards, frogs, and blue Ulysses butterflies attract photographers, and sport fishermen come here to hook the big barramundi.

gushing river tumbling over boulders, and the short forest walks are magical. (Don't climb on the rocks or enter the river, as strong currents are dangerous and have claimed at least one life in recent years).

Most four-wheel-drive Daintree tours include a 1-hour cruise on the **Daintree River** ★, but if yours does not or you want to spend more time on the river, cruises are available on a variety of boats, ranging from open-sided "river trains" to small fishing boats. One of the best is with **Dan Irby's Mangrove Adventures** ★ (✆ **07/4090 7017;** www.mangroveadventures.com.au), whose small open boat can get up side creeks the bigger boats can't. Originally from Oklahoma, Dan has been in Australia for 30 years and is knowledgeable about the wildlife and habitat. He takes no more than 10 people at a time on 2-, 3-, and 4-hour cruises. It is important to make advance reservations with Dan (at least 24 hr. ahead, if possible) to ensure seats and to determine departure times. Chances are you will spot lots of wildlife on his 2-hour night cruise, but even if you don't, it's worth it just to see the stars! A 2-hour trip costs A$45 (US$36). Night trips depart from Daintree Eco Lodge, 20 Mossman Daintree Rd., 4km (2½ miles) south of Daintree village; day trips leave from the public jetty next to the Daintree River ferry crossing. You can combine both, taking an afternoon tour, followed by a 45-minute break for a snack at Daintree Eco Lodge, then the night tour. Take the Captain Cook Highway north to Mossman, where it becomes the Mossman Daintree Road, and follow it for 24km (15 miles) to the signposted turnoff for the ferry on your right. The ferry is 5km (3 miles) from the turnoff. You'll need a car to get there.

Birders love the Wet Tropics rainforests of which the Daintree and Cape Tribulation national parks are part. More than half of Australia's bird species have been recorded within 200km (120 miles) of this area. **Fine Feather Tours** (✆ **07/4094 1199;** www.finefeathertours.com.au) has a full-day bird-watching safari through the Wet Tropics to the edge of the Outback for A$205 (US$164), an afternoon cruise on the Daintree River for A$145 (US$116), and other tours.

**Rainforest Habitat** wildlife sanctuary (✆ **07/4099 3235;** www.rainforesthabitat.com.au) is a great place to see the animals that are too shy to be spotted in the wild. Here, 180 animal species from the Wet Tropics can be seen up close. You can see saltwater and freshwater crocodiles, hand-feed kangaroos, and have your photo taken beside (but not holding) a koala (10–11am and 3–4pm for a donation of any amount). The highlight is the walk-through aviary, which houses more than 100 Wet Tropics bird species, including cassowaries. You'll get the most out of your visit if you take one of the excellent free guided tours that leave every half-hour from 9am to

3pm. Rainforest Habitat is on Port Douglas Road at the turnoff from the Captain Cook Highway. Open daily (except Dec 25) from 8am to 5:30pm (last admission at 4:30pm). Admission is A$28 (US$22) for adults, A$14 (US$11) for kids 4 to 14. Between 8 and 11am, the park serves a champagne buffet breakfast for A$39 (US$31) for adults and A$20 (US$16) for kids 4 to 14, including admission. From July to October, you can experience Habitat After Dark, an evening tour that includes dinner and entertainment. It costs A$49 (US$39) for adults and A$29 (US$23) for kids 4 to 14. Allow at least 2 hours here.

One company that shows you plenty of rainforest creatures in the wild is **Wait-a-While Rainforest Tours** (✆ **07/4098 2422**) whose rainforest wildlife-spotting walks are described in "Exploring the Wet Tropics," in the "Cairns" section, earlier in this chapter. They also do pickups from Port Douglas.

**DISCOVERING ABORIGINAL CULTURE** Members of the native KuKu-Yalanji tribe will teach you about bush medicines and food, Dreamtime legends, and the sacred sites their families have called home for tens of thousands of years. **KuKu-Yalanji Dreamtime Walks** ★ (✆ **07/4098 2595;** www.yalanji.com.au) offers a guided walk through the rainforest to see cave paintings and visit "special sites"; the tour is followed by a Dreamtime story over billy tea and damper in a bark *warun* (shelter). You can buy artifacts from the tribe's information center, gift shop, and art gallery. Walks run for either 30 or 90 minutes. The 90-minute tours depart Monday through Friday at 10am, noon, and 2pm from the Kuku-Yalanji community, on the road to Mossman Gorge (1km/½ mile before you reach the Gorge parking lot). Short walks leave daily at 9, 11am, 1, and 3pm. Tours cost A$20 (US$16) for adults and A$13 (US$10) for children for 90 minutes, A$11 (US$8.80) adults and A$7 (US$5.60) children for 30 minutes.

Hazel Douglas of **Native Guide Safari Tours** ★ (✆ **07/4098 2206;** www.nativeguidesafaritours.com.au) runs four-wheel-drive tours of the rainforest from an Aboriginal perspective. Hazel is a full-blooded Aborigine who had a tribal upbringing in the Daintree. She imparts her knowledge of plants, animals, Dreamtime myths, and Aboriginal history on a full-day tour departing at 9:15am from your Port Douglas hotel. Passengers from Cairns transfer on the Quicksilver catamaran and return by coach (northern beaches) or catamaran (Cairns). The trip costs A$130 (US$104) for adults and A$80 (US$64) for children 3 to 14 from Port Douglas, and A$10 (US$8) more from Cairns or the northern beaches. Charter and half-day tours are available.

## OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES

Some companies in Cairns that offer outdoor activities will provide inexpensive or free pickups from Port Douglas hotels. See "White-Water Rafting & Other Thrills," in the "Cairns" section, earlier in this chapter, for details.

Every Sunday, a colorful **handicrafts and fresh food market** sets up on the lawns under the mango trees beside Dickson Inlet at the end of Macrossan Street. Stalls sell everything from fresh coconut milk to foot massages. It runs from 7:30am to 1pm.

### *Tips* The Secret of the Seasons

High season in Port Douglas is generally from June 1 through October 31.

While you're here, take a peek, or attend a nondenominational service, inside the pretty timber **St. Mary's by the Sea Church.**

The cheapest and best outdoor activity in Port Douglas is to do absolutely nothing but laze on spectacular **Four Mile Beach** ★★. May through September the water is stinger-free. October through April, swim in the safety net. **Extra Action Water Sports** (✆ **07/4099 3175**) offers parasailing, jet-skiing, and tube rides on Four Mile Beach. A half-hour on a jet ski or parasail is A$70 (US$56) solo or A$90 (US$72) tandem. The booking office is at the end of the jetty on the Port Douglas slipway.

Visitor greens fees at the championship **Sheraton Mirage** golf course on Port Douglas Road are A$145 (US$116) for 18 holes or A$85 (US$68) for 9 holes, including a cart. Club rental costs A$38 to A$60 (US$30–US$48). Whacking a ball on the hotel's aquatic driving range costs A$6.50 (US$5.20) for a bucket of 25 balls, A$13 (US$10) for 50 balls, plus A$2.15 (US$1.70) for club rental. Contact the **Pro Shop** (✆ **07/4099 5537**). An 18-hole round on the humbler but equally picturesque 72-par public course at the **Mossman Golf Club,** Newell Beach Road, Mossman (✆ **07/4098 2089**) is A$25 (US$20), or A$15 (US$12) for 9 holes.

**Mowbray Valley Trail Rides** (✆ **07/4099 3268**), located 13km (8 miles) inland from Port Douglas, offers 2-hour horseback rides for A$88 (US$70). Half-day rides through rainforest and sugarcane fields to Collards Falls, or to a swimming hole in the Hidden Valley, cost A$95 (US$76), including a barbecue lunch. It also runs full-day trips along the mountainous Bump Track (weather permitting), followed by a dip in a rainforest pool and barbecue lunch at Mowbray Falls for A$130 (US$104) per person. Prices include transfers from your Port Douglas accommodations. Transfers from Cairns are A$25 (US$20) per person. **Wonga Beach Equestrian Centre** (✆ **07/4098 7583**) does 3-hour rides through the rainforest and along Wonga Beach, 35 minutes north of Port Douglas, for A$89 (US$71) adults and A$79 (US$63) children, plus A$9 (US$7.20) per person for insurance. Transfers from Port Douglas are included. Rides start at 8:30am and 3pm.

**Bike 'n' Hike** (✆ **07/4099 4000**) takes small groups biking, hiking, and swimming in natural lagoons in the Mowbray Valley in the rainforest near Port Douglas. You don't need to be a strong cyclist to take part, but you must be over 11. A half-day tour costs A$88 (US$70), including pickup from your Port Douglas hotel, a 27-speed mountain bike, helmet, gloves, backpack, snack, and drinks.

## 4 The North Coast: Mission Beach, Townsville & the Islands

For years the lovely town of **Mission Beach** ★ was a well-kept secret. Farmers retired here, then those who liked to drop out and chill out discovered it; today, it's a petite, prosperous, and stunningly pretty rainforest town. The beach is one of the most gorgeous in Australia, a long white strip fringed with dense tangled vine forests, the only surviving lowlands rainforest in the Australian tropics. It is also one of the least crowded and least spoiled.

The nearby **Tully River** is the white-water rafting capital of Australia (although the folks on the Nymboida River in New South Wales might argue about that). Thrill-seekers can also bungee jump and tandem skydive when they're not rushing down the rapids between lush rainforest banks.

From Mission Beach it's just minutes in a ferry to **Dunk Island,** a resort island that welcomes day-trippers. You can even kayak there from the mainland. Mission Beach

### Tips Cassowaries, Crocs & Stingers, Oh My!

Endangered cassowaries (ostrichlike birds with a blue bony crown on their head) can kill with their enormous claws, so never approach one. If you disturb one, back off slowly and hide behind a tree.

Dangerous crocodiles inhabit the local waterways. Do not swim in, or stand on the bank of, any river or stream.

You will spend plenty of time lazing and strolling the area's 14km (8½ miles) of gorgeous beaches, but be careful about where you swim. Deadly marine stingers inhabit the sea from October through April; in these times swim only within the stinger nets at the north and south ends of Mission Beach.

is closer to the Great Barrier Reef than any other point on the coast—it's just an hour away, and cruise boats depart daily from the jetty, stopping en route at Dunk Island.

A few hours' drive south brings you to Townsville, also a gateway to the Great Barrier Reef, but more important to visitors, a gateway to **Magnetic Island,** a picturesque, laid-back haven for the flip-flop and watersports crowd.

## MISSION BEACH: THE CASSOWARY COAST

140km (84 miles) S of Cairns; 240km (144 miles) N of Townsville

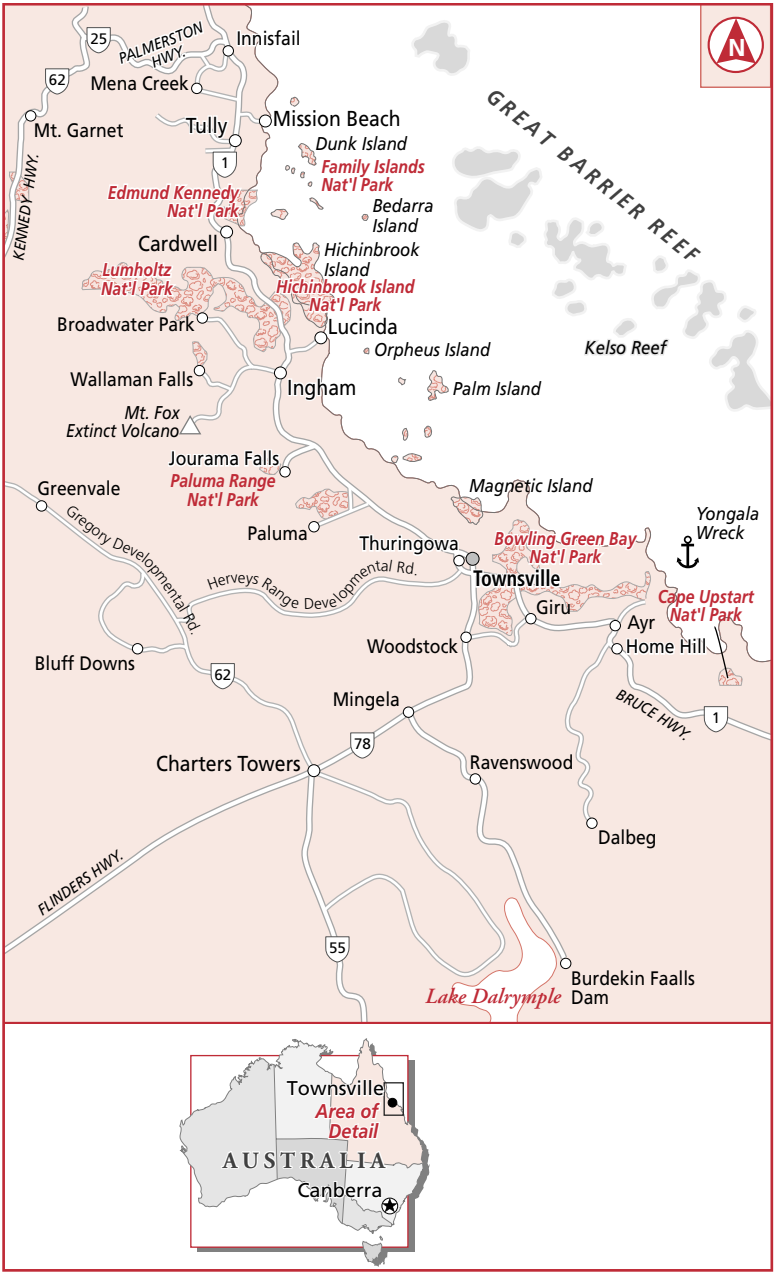
Tucked off the Bruce Highway, the exquisite township of Mission Beach has managed to duck the tourist hordes. It's a conglomeration of four beachfront towns: South Mission Beach, Wongaling Beach, Mission Beach proper, and Bingil Bay. Most commercial activity revolves around the small nucleus of shops and businesses at Mission Beach proper. It's so isolated that signs on the way into town warn you to watch out for cassowaries crossing the road. A rainforest hides the town from view until you come around the corner to Mission Beach to find tidy villages of appealing hotels, neat shops, and smart restaurants. Just through the trees is the fabulous beach. Less than a kilometer north of the main settlement is Clump Point Jetty.

### ESSENTIALS

**GETTING THERE** **By Car** From Cairns, follow the Bruce Highway south. The Mission Beach turnoff is at the tiny town of El Arish, about 15km (9 miles) north of Tully. Mission Beach is 25km (15 miles) off the highway. It's a 90-minute trip from Cairns. If you're coming from Townsville, there is an earlier turnoff just north of Tully that leads 18km (11 miles) to South Mission Beach.

**By Bus** **Mission Beach Connections** (✆ **07/4059 2709**) operates door-to-door shuttles three times a day from Cairns and Cairns Airport for A$32 to A$38 (US$26–US$30) adults and A$16 to A$19 (US$13–US$15) children, and from the northern beaches for A$43 (US$34) adults and A$22 (US$18) children. **Greyhound Australia** (✆ **13 14 99** in Australia, or 07/4690 9950) coaches stop in Mission Beach proper (not South Mission Beach) several times daily on the Cairns-Brisbane-Cairns runs. The fare is A$25 (US$20) per person from Cairns, A$195 (US$156) for the 26-hour-plus trip from Brisbane.

**By Train** Five **trains** a week on the Cairns-Brisbane-Cairns route serve the nearest station, Tully, about 20km (13 miles) away. One-way travel from Cairns on the Tilt Train costs A$43 (US$34) for the 2-hour 50-minute journey. From Brisbane, fares


25
PALMERSTON HWY.
62
Innisfail
Mena Creek
Mt. Garnet
Tully
1
Mission Beach
Dunk Island
Family Islands Nat'l Park
Bedarra Island
KENNEDY HWY.
Edmund Kennedy Nat'l Park
Cardwell
Hichinbrook Island
Lumholtz Nat'l Park
Hichinbrook Island Nat'l Park
Broadwater Park
Lucinda
Orpheus Island
Kelso Reef
GREAT BARRIER REEF
Wallaman Falls
Ingham
Palm Island
Mt. Fox Extinct Volcano
Jourama Falls
Paluma Range Nat'l Park
Greenvale
Magnetic Island
Yongala Wreck
Gregory Developmental Rd.
Paluma
Thuringowa
Bowling Green Bay Nat'l Park
Herveys Range Developmental Rd.
Townsville
Giru
Cape Upstart Nat'l Park
Ayr
Home Hill
Woodstock
Bluff Downs
62
Mingela
BRUCE HWY.
1
78
Charters Towers
Ravenswood
Dalbeg
FLINDERS HWY.
55
Lake Dalrymple
Burdekin Falls Dam
Townsville
Area of Detail
AUSTRALIA
Canberra

range from A$183 (US$146) in an economy seat to A$345 (US$276) for a first-class sleeper on the *Sunlander.* For more information, call Queensland Rail's long-distance division, **Traveltrain** (✆ **13 22 32** in Australia, or 07/3235 1122; www.traveltrain.com.au). A taxi from Tully to Mission Beach with **Supreme Taxis** (✆ **07/4068 3937**) is about A$40 (US$32).

**VISITOR INFORMATION** The **Mission Beach Visitor Centre,** Porters Promenade, Mission Beach, QLD 4852 (✆ **07/4068 7099;** fax 07/4068 7066; www.missionbeachtourism.com), is at the northern end of town. It's open Monday through Saturday from 9am to 5pm, and Sunday from 9am to 4pm.

**GETTING AROUND** **Trans North Bus & Coach** (✆ **07/4068 7400**) provides bus service linking the beach communities from Bingal Bay to South Mission Beach. Just flag the bus down outside your accommodations or wherever you see it. **Sugarland Car Rentals** (✆ **07/4068 8272**) is the only rental-car company in town. For Mission Beach taxi service, call ✆ **07/4068 8155.**

## WHERE TO STAY

### Beachcomber Coconut Caravan Village

This award-winning caravan park, across the road from the beach (and, more important in summer, the stinger net), has neat lawns and abundant palms. The deluxe cabins are almost as roomy and as well appointed as an apartment. Villa cabins have bathrooms with a hair dryer and fluffy white towels, a separate living and dining area, a good-size kitchen, a master bedroom, room with bunk beds for the kids, and a Jacuzzi! The regular cabins have older decor and less room, but they're fine enough. All cabins and villas have a TV. Campers have a communal kitchen, a fridge, and barbecues. Pitch your tent at the jungle's edge and keep an eye out for the cassowaries that stroll in now and then. The restaurant features a "roast night" on Wednesdays and there's a takeout shop that sells basic groceries.

Kennedy Esplanade, South Mission Beach, QLD 4852. ✆ **1800/008 129** in Australia, or 07/4068 8129. Fax 07/4068 8671. www.beachcombercoconut.com.au. 27 cabins, 15 with bathroom (shower only), 4 with spa baths; 80 powered sites; approximately 20 tent sites. A$29–A$31 (US$23–US$25) double unpowered campsite; A$31–A$34 (US$25–US$27) double powered campsite; A$50–A$75 (US$40–US$60) double cabins; A$110–A$140 (US$88–US$112) 2-bedroom villas; A$120–A$150 (US$96–US$120) spa villas. Extra adult A$12 (US$9.60), extra child A$8 (US$6.40) in campsite; extra adult A$18 (US$14), extra child A$9 (US$7.20) in cabin. Linen and towel hire A$10 (US$8), A$5 (US$4) blanket in regular cabins (free in deluxe cabins and villas). MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; outdoor pool; half-court tennis; children's playground; TV and game room; tour desk. *In room:* A/C, TV, kitchen, hair dryer, iron (villas only).

### Mackays *Value*

This well-kept motel is one of the best deals in town. It's just 80m (262 ft.) from the beach and 400m (¼ mile) from the heart of Mission Beach. The friendly Mackay family repaints the rooms annually, so the place always looks brand-new. All the rooms are pleasant and spacious, with white-tiled floors, cane sofas, colorful bedcovers, and very clean bathrooms. Those in the newer section are air-conditioned, and some have views of the attractive granite-lined pool and gardens.

*Tips* **Bring Along the Cash . . .**

There is no bank in Mission Beach, and the only ATM is at Mission Beach Resort, Wongaling Beach, so come with enough cash or traveler's checks, and/or a credit card.

Rooms in the older painted-brick wing have garden views from a communal patio and no air-conditioning. Apartments don't have air-conditioning, either, but do have kitchenettes. Ask about special packages; they can be extremely good deals and may include extras like rafting on the Tully River and day trips to the Reef and Dunk Island.

7 Porter Promenade, Mission Beach, QLD 4852. ✆ **07/4068 7212.** Fax 07/4068 7095. www.mackaysmissionbeach.com. 22 units, 12 with bathroom (10 with shower only). A$85–A$105 (US$68–US$84) double; A$120 (US$96) 1- and 2-bedroom apt. Higher rates apply at Easter. Extra adult A$20 (US$16), extra child under 14 A$10 (US$8). Crib A$10 (US$8). Ask about packages. AE, DC, MC, V. Free covered parking. **Amenities:** Outdoor pool; access to nearby tennis courts; access to bike rental; tour desk; car-rental desk; room service (breakfast only); in-room massage; babysitting; coin-op laundry; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C (in some), TV, fax, kitchenette (in apts), fridge, safe.

**Mission Beach Eco Village** This lodge occupies a magical site in the rainforest on Clump Point, surrounded on three sides by water. You don't see the sea from your room, but it's a step away to the sandy beach where you can swim and snorkel in a picture-perfect lagoon. Stay in simple, roomy bungalows under the trees. Each has pine paneling, tile floors, a very clean bathroom, and a deck. Some have a kitchenette and a dining area, some have Jacuzzis; family bungalows have three bunks for the kids. Breakfast is served on your balcony, and dinner is among the trees in an open-sided Malaysian longhouse-style restaurant. The natural-looking pool is lined with rocks and trees, and there's a barbecue area.

Clump Point Rd., Mission Beach. QLD 4852. ✆ **07/4068 7534.** Fax 07/4068 7538. www.ecovillage.com.au. 17 bungalows (all with shower; 6 with spa bath). A$162 (US$130) double; A$178 (US$142) family or spa bungalow. AE, DC, MC, V. Free off-street parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor pool; Jacuzzi; children's playground; tour desk; coin-op laundry. *In room:* A/C, TV w/in-house movies, kitchenette (in some), minibar (deluxe rooms only), hair dryer (in some), iron (in some).

### Worth a Splurge

**The Horizon** ★ With its beguiling views across the pool to Dunk Island, its rainforest setting, and its impressive rooms, this resort perched on a steep hillside is one of the most comfortable and beautiful you will find. Even the least expensive rooms are spacious and have luxurious bathrooms. All but a handful of rooms have some kind of sea view; a half-dozen retain the older-style bathrooms from a previous resort development, but the sea views from these rooms are the best. It's just a minute or two down the rainforest track to the beach.

Explorer Dr., South Mission Beach, QLD 4852. ✆ **1800/079 090** in Australia, or 07/4068 8154. Fax 07/4068 8596. www.thehorizon.com.au. 55 units. A$220–A$420 (US$176–US$336) double. Child A$20 (US$16) extra. Ask about packages and specials. Rates higher Dec 22–Jan 2. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 3 restaurants; bar; large saltwater pool; lit tennis courts; tour desk. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

## WHERE TO DINE

Having a picnic on the beach or in one of the many small rainforest parks and barbecue areas that dot the beachfront is the obvious way to enjoy a meal in Mission Beach. Most restaurants and cafes are in Mission Beach proper, but you will find a couple more in South Mission Beach. For tasty, cheap meals, try **That'll Do** (✆ **07/4068 7300**); it's next to the supermarket on Porter's Promenade in Mission Beach. The burgers, fish and chips, chili, and ice cream rarely cost more than A$5 (US$4) or so. Take your food to go or eat at one of the plastic tables. You can even BYO. It's open daily 11am to 8:30pm.

**Friends** MEDITERRANEAN/SEAFOOD The cozy interior and a hearty menu favoring local seafood make this place a long-standing favorite with locals. Appetizers

include mussels Normandy, oysters done three ways, and garlic prawns. Main courses feature lamb shanks, steak with mushrooms or green peppercorn sauce, and chicken hot pot. Settle in with a homemade dessert and liqueur coffee after dinner. Licensed.

Porters Promenade (opposite Campbell St.). ✆ **07/4068 7107.** Reservations recommended. Main courses A$15–A$25 (US$12–US$20). AE, MC, V. Tues–Sat and Sun on long weekends 6:30–10:30pm or until the last diners leave. Closed 4 weeks during Feb–Mar.

## WHAT TO SEE & DO IN THE AREA

**EXPLORING THE REEF** **The Quick Cat** runs snorkel and dive trips from Mission Beach to Beaver Cay on the outer Great Barrier Reef. See the "Exploring the Great Barrier Reef" section, earlier in this chapter, for details.

**WHITE-WATER RAFTING ON THE TULLY** A day's rafting through the rainforest on the Class III to IV Tully River is an adventure you won't soon forget. In raft-speak, Class IV means "exciting rafting on moderate rapids with a continuous need to maneuver rafts." On the Tully, that translates to regular hair-raising but manageable rapids punctuated by calming stretches that let you float downstream. You don't need experience, just a decent level of agility and an enthusiastic attitude. **RnR Rafting** (✆ **07/4041 9444**) runs a daily trip that includes 5 hours on the river with fun, expert guides, a barbecue lunch in the rainforest, and a video screening of your adventure. With transfers, the day costs A$140 (US$112) from Mission Beach; A$150 (US$120) from Cairns, the northern beaches, or Palm Cove; and A$170 (US$136) from Port Douglas, plus a A$10 (US$8) national park fee. You must be age 13 or over.

**EXPLORING THE RAINFOREST & COAST** Walking, wildlife spotting, canoeing in the forest, and kayaking along the pristine coast are all well worth doing. Hiking trails abound through rainforest, in fan palm groves, and along the beach. The 8km (5-mile) **Licuala Fan Palm track** starts at the parking lot on the Mission Beach–Tully Road about 1.5km (1 mile) west of the turnoff to South Mission Beach. It leads through dense forest and over creeks, and comes out on the El Arish–Mission Beach Road about 7km (4 miles) north of the post office. When you come out, you can cross the road and keep going on the 1.2km (less than 1-mile) **Lacey Creek loop** in the Tam O'Shanter State Forest. A shorter **Rainforest Circuit** option leads from the parking lot at the start of the Licuala Fan Palm track and makes a 1.2km (less than a mile) loop incorporating a fan palm boardwalk. There's also a 10-minute "follow the cassowary footprints to the nest" **children's walk** leading from the parking lot.

If you would rather see the sea than rainforest, take the 7km (4-mile) **Edmund Kennedy track,** which starts below the Horizon resort at the southern end of the Kennedy Esplanade in South Mission Beach. You get alternating views of the ocean and the rainforest on this trail. The Mission Beach Visitor Centre has free trail maps.

**HITTING THE BEACH** Of course, lazing on the uncrowded beach is what everyone comes to Mission Beach to do. From June to September you can swim anywhere, and the water is still warm; from October to May stick to the stinger safety nets at Mission Beach proper (behind Castaways resort) and South Mission Beach.

**A DAY TRIP TO DUNK ISLAND** If you're a beachcomber at heart, Dunk will fulfill your dreams. Just 5km (3 miles) offshore from Mission Beach, Dunk was the inspiration for E. J. Banfield's book *Confessions of a Beachcomber.* Banfield moved to Dunk in the early 1900s to live out what he thought would be a short life. He lived for another 23 years, which must say something about the restorative powers of a piece of paradise. The graves of Ed and his wife, Bertha, are along the track to Mt. Kootaloo.

Thick bushland and rainforest cover much of the island's 12 sq. km (5 sq. miles), most of which is a national park. The island is renowned for its myriad birds and electric-blue Ulysses butterflies.

Staying at the upscale Dunk Island Resort is a budget-busting experience, but you can pop over for the day to snorkel, hike in the forest, or do watersports. **Dunk Island Ferry & Cruises** (✆ **07/4068 7211**) runs day trips for A$69 (US$55) for adults and A$25 (US$20) for kids 4 to 14, free for kids under 4. The cruise includes lunch, boom-netting (something like water-skiing, but partially submerged in a net pulled by a speedboat), a swing around Bedarra Island, and free snorkeling gear (with a A$20/US$16 refundable deposit). Daily departures are from Clump Point Jetty at 8:45 and 10:30am. You can also get to Dunk by **water taxi** (✆ **07/4068 8310**), which runs five times a day from Wongaling Beach. The round-trip fare is A$29 (US$23) for adults and A$15 (US$12) for kids 4 to 14. Ask at your accommodations about transfers between Clump Point and South Mission Beach.

Once on Dunk, you pay as you go for activities and equipment rental. Everything from water-skiing to catamaran sailing is available, and Dunk has lovely beaches and half a dozen rainforest walking trails, ranging in duration from 15 minutes to 4 hours. On Monday and Thursday mornings, you can visit an artist's gallery reached on a 40-minute trail through the rainforest; admission is A$4 (US$3.20).

## TOWNSVILLE & MAGNETIC ISLAND

346km (207 miles) S of Cairns; 1,371km (822 miles) N of Brisbane

With a population of 140,000, Townsville claims to be Australia's largest tropical city. Because of its size, and economy based on mining, manufacturing, education, and tourism, it is sometimes unjustly overlooked as a holiday destination. The people are friendly; the city is pleasant, and there's plenty to do. The town is nestled by the sea below the pink face of **Castle Rock,** which looms 300m (about 1,000 ft.) above, and the beachfront has recently undergone a A$29-million (US$23-million) revamp.

Townsville's major attraction is the world-class **Museum of Tropical Queensland,** where a full-size replica of the HMS *Pandora* is the stunning centerpiece. The museum is next to one of the city's most enduring attractions, the **Reef HQ aquarium.**

Remnants of bygone times are still apparent in surrounding towns like **Charters Towers** and **Ravenswood,** which offer splendid examples of colonial architecture, historic hotels, museums, and displays of old gold mining machinery and cottages.

Cruises depart from the harbor for the Great Barrier Reef, about 2½ hours away, and just 8km (5 miles) offshore is Magnetic Island—"Maggie" to the locals—a popular place for watersports, hiking, and spotting koalas in the wild.

### ESSENTIALS

**GETTING THERE** Townsville is on the Bruce Highway, a 3-hour drive north of Airlie Beach and 4½ hours south of Cairns. The Bruce Highway breaks temporarily in the city. From the south, take Bruce Highway Alt. 1 route into the city. From the north, the highway leads into the city.

**Qantas** (✆ **13 13 13** in Australia, or 800/227-4500 in the U.S. and Canada; www.qantas.com.au) flies direct from Brisbane. **QantasLink** flies from Cairns, Sydney, Hamilton Island in the Whitsundays, and Mackay. **Virgin Blue** (✆ **13 67 89** in Australia, or 07/3295 2296) flies direct to Townsville from Brisbane and Sydney daily, and charter airline **Alliance Airlines** (✆ **1300/130 092** in Australia, or 07/3212 1212;

www.allianceairlines.com.au) also has scheduled flights between Brisbane and Townsville twice a week.

**Abacus Charters & Tours** (✆ **07/4775 5544**) runs a door-to-door airport shuttle. It meets all flights from Brisbane, and from Cairns or elsewhere if you book in advance. A trip into town is A$7 (US$5.60) one-way or A$11 (US$8.80) round-trip. A **taxi** from the airport to most central hotels costs about A$12 (US$9.60).

Seven **Queensland Rail** (✆ **13 22 32** in Queensland, or 07/3235 1122; www.qr.com.au) long-distance trains stop at Townsville each week. The 19-hour Tilt Train journey from Brisbane costs A$256 (US$205). The 24-hour *Sunlander* journey costs A$171 (US$137) for an economy seat, A$398 (US$318) for a first-class sleeper.

**Greyhound Australia** (✆ **13 14 99** in Australia, or 07/4690 9950) coaches stop at Townsville many times a day on their Cairns-Brisbane-Cairns routes. The fare from Cairns is A$53 (US$42); trip time is 6 hours. The fare from Brisbane is A$172 (US$138); trip time is 23 hours.

**VISITOR INFORMATION** For an information packet, contact **Townsville Enterprise Limited,** P.O. Box 1043, Townsville, QLD 4810 (✆ **07/4726 2728;** www.townsvilleonline.com.au). It has two Information Centres. One is in the heart of town on Flinders Mall (✆ **1800/801 902** in Australia, or 07/4721 3660); it's open Monday through Friday from 9am to 5pm, and weekends from 9am to 1pm. The other is on the Bruce Highway 10km (6¼ miles) south of the city (✆ **07/4778 3555**); it's open daily from 9am to 5pm. For information on Magnetic Island, also check www.magnetic-island.com.au or www.magneticislandinfo.com.

**GETTING AROUND** Local **Sunbus** (✆ 07/4725 8482) buses depart Flinders Mall. Car-rental chains include **Avis** (✆ 07/4721 2688), **Budget** (✆ 07/4725 2344), **Hertz** (✆ 07/4775 5950), and **Thrifty** (✆ 07/4725 4600).

**Detours Coaches** (✆ **07/4728 5311**) runs tours to most attractions in and around Townsville. For a taxi, call ✆ **13 10 08.**

## WHERE TO STAY

**Aquarius on the Beach** ★ *Value* You get nice views of the bay and Magnetic Island from every room at this slightly older-style 14-story waterfront hotel. It's popular with business travelers who like the location and the amenities like 24-hour reception. With a kitchenette, sofa, desk, and a small dining table with two chairs squeezed into every room, there's not much space left, but the accommodations are comfortable. If space is important, ask for a corner room, as they are slightly larger. All rooms have private balconies. Executive rooms on the top three floors also have CD stereo systems. The views and facilities make this a good value. The Strand beach is across the road; the town center and island ferry terminals are 15 minutes' walk away.

75 The Strand, Townsville, QLD 4810. ✆ **1800/62 2474** in Australia, or 07/4772 4255. Fax 07/4721 1316. www.aquariusonthebeach.com.au. 100 units. A$150 (US$120) double studio; A$175 (US$140) double executive room. Extra person A$13 (US$10). AE, DC, MC, V. Free covered parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; outdoor pool and children's pool; tour desk; car-rental desk; airport shuttle; room service. *In room:* A/C, TV w/free movies, kitchenette, fridge, hair dryer, iron.

**Seagulls Resort** This popular low-key resort, a 5-minute drive from the city, is built around an inviting free-form saltwater pool in 1.2 hectares (3 acres) of dense tropical gardens. Despite the Esplanade location, the motel-style rooms do not boast waterfront views, but they are comfortable and a good size. The larger deluxe rooms have painted brick walls, a sofa, dining furniture, and a kitchen sink. Reef rooms and

suites have kitchenettes; executive suites have Jacuzzis. Apartments have a main bedroom and a bunk bedroom, a kitchenette, dining furniture, and a roomy balcony. The rooms were last refurbished in late 1997, and the modest fittings are in good condition. The foyer was refurbished in late 2000, and the whole resort is wheelchair friendly, with bathroom facilities for people with disabilities. The accommodations wings surround the pool and its pretty open-sided restaurant, which is popular with locals. It's a 10-minute walk to The Strand; the resort makes free transfers to the city and Magnetic Island ferry terminals, and most tour companies pick up at the door.

74 The Esplanade, Belgian Gardens, QLD 4810. ✆ **1800/079 929** in Australia, or 07/4721 3111. Fax 07/4721 3133. www.seagulls.com.au. 70 units (all with shower only). A$103–A$114 (US$82–US$91) double; A$139 (US$111) 2-bedroom apt; A$150 (US$120) executive suite. Extra adult A$15 (US$12), extra children under 14 A$9 (US$7.20). Crib A$9 (US$7.20). AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. Bus: 7. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; 2 large outdoor saltwater pools; children's wading pool; access to nearby golf course; small tennis court; access to nearby health club; playground; tour desk; airport shuttle (A$3/US$2.40 one-way); business center; room service (dinner only); coin-op laundry; laundry service (Mon–Fri); dry cleaning; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV w/free movies, dataport, kitchenette (in some), fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

### A B&B with Victorian Charm

**The Rocks** ★ *Finds* If you have a weakness for Victoriana, you will sigh with delight when you enter this exquisitely renovated old Queenslander home. The owners have fitted it with 19th-century antiques, from the crimson velvet settee to the grandfather clock in the drawing room. Even the meals are served on collectible dinnerware. Every room is decorated with lovely linens and old trunks; a few even have original washbasins tastefully wrapped in muslin "gowns." Four have bathrooms; the others share a historically decorated bathroom with a cast-iron claw-foot tub. Complimentary sherry is served at 6pm on the wide veranda, which has lovely views of Magnetic Island and Cleveland Bay. Despite the old-world ambience, the house has telephone, fax, Internet, and e-mail access for guests (although not in the guest rooms). Free tea and coffee are available. There's also an outdoor Jacuzzi, a billiards table (antique, of course), and a guest laundry. The Strand is a minute's stroll away, and you are a 5-minute walk from town and the Magnetic Island ferries.

20 Cleveland Terrace, Townsville, QLD 4810. ✆ **07/4771 5700,** or 0416/044 409 mobile. Fax 07/4771 5711. www.therocksguesthouse.com. 7 units, 4 with private bathroom (shower only). A$85–A$99 (US$68–US$79) single; A$105–A$119 (US$84–US$95) double. Extra person A$25 (US$20). Rates include continental breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Limited free street parking. **Amenities:** Outdoor Jacuzzi; tour desk; airport shuttle; business center; laundry service. *In room:* A/C.

## WHERE TO DINE

Apart from the suggestion below, you will find more restaurants and cafes on Palmer Street, an easy stroll across the river from Flinders Mall.

**Michel's Cafe and Bar** MODERN AUSTRALIAN This contemporary space is popular with Townsville's in crowd. Choose a table on the sidewalk or opt for air-conditioning inside. Owner-chef Michel Flores works in the open kitchen where he can keep an eye on the excellent servers. You might choose Louisiana blackened rib filet, kangaroo, or the stylish pizzas, pastas, seafood, or warm salads.

7 Palmer St. ✆ **07/4724 1460.** Reservations recommended. Main courses A$11–A$23 (US$8.80–US$18). AE, DC, MC, V. Tues–Fri 11:30am–3pm; Tues–Sun 5:30–10pm.

## THE TOP ATTRACTIONS

For details on visiting the Great Barrier Reef from Townsville, see "Exploring the Great Barrier Reef," earlier in this chapter.

**Museum of Tropical Queensland** ★★ A stunning 2002 addition to Townsville's skyline is this A$22-million (US$18-million) museum, with its curved roof reminiscent of a ship in full sail. In pride of place is the amazing exhibition of relics salvaged from the wreck of HMS *Pandora,* which lies 33m (108 ft.) underwater on the edge of the Great Barrier Reef, 120km (74 miles) east of Cape York. The *Pandora* exhibit includes a full-scale replica of a section of the ship's bow and its 17m-high (56-ft.) foremast. Standing three stories high, the replica and its copper-clad keel were crafted by local shipwrights for the museum. *Pandora* sank in 1791, and the wreck was discovered in 1977. The exhibition traces the ship's voyage and the retrieval of the sunken treasure. The museum has six galleries, including a hands-on science center, and a natural history display that looks at life in tropical Queensland—above and below the water. Another is dedicated to north Queensland's indigenous heritage, with items from Torres Strait and the South Sea Islands as well as stories from people of different cultures about the settlement and labor of north Queensland. Touring exhibitions change every 3 months. Allow 2 to 3 hours.

70–102 Flinders St. (next to Reef HQ). ✆ **07/4726 0600,** or 07/4726 0606 info line. www.mtq.qld.gov.au. Admission A$9 (US$7.20) adults, A$6.50 (US$5.20) seniors and students, A$5 (US$4) children 4–16, A$24 (US$19) families of 5. MC, V. Daily 9:30am–5pm. Closed Good Friday, Dec 25, and until 1pm Apr 25 (Anzac Day).

**Reef HQ** ★ *Kids* Reef HQ is the education center for the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority's headquarters and is the largest living coral reef aquarium in the world. It underwent a A$6.4-million (US$5.1-million) upgrade in 2002, but the highlight is still walking through a 20m-long (66-ft.) transparent acrylic tunnel, gazing right into a giant predator tank where sharks cruise silently. The wreck of SS *Yongala* provides an eerie backdrop for blacktip and whitetip reef sharks, leopard sharks, and nurse sharks, sharing their 750,000-liter (195,000-gal.) home with stingrays, giant *trevally,* and a green turtle. Watching them feed is quite a spectacle. The tunnel also reveals the 2.5-million-liter (650,000-gal.) coral reef exhibit, with its hard and soft corals providing a home for thousands of colorful fish, giant clams, sea cucumbers, sea stars, and other creatures. During the scuba-dive show, the divers speak to you over an intercom while they swim with the sharks and feed the fish. Other highlights include a marine creature touch tank, a wild sea-turtle rehabilitation center, plus great interactive activities for children. Reef HQ is an easy walk from the city center.

2–68 Flinders St. ✆ **07/4750 0800.** www.reefhq.com.au. Admission A$22 (US$18) adults, A$17 (US$14) seniors and students, A$11 (US$8.80) children 4–16, A$54 (US$43) families of 5. AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 9am–5pm. Closed Dec 25. Bus: 1, 1A, or 1B (stop 3-min. walk away).

## OTHER THINGS TO SEE & DO

**The Strand** is a 2.5km (1½-mile) strip with safe swimming beaches, a fitness circuit, a water park for the kids, and plenty of covered picnic areas and free gas barbecues. Stroll along the promenade or relax at one of many cafes, restaurants, and bars while you gaze across the Coral Sea to Magnetic Island. For the more active, there are areas to in-line skate, bicycle, walk, or fish, and there's a basketball half-court. Four rocky headlands and a picturesque jetty adjacent to Strand Park provide good fishing, and two surf lifesaving clubs service the three swimming areas along The Strand. With 300 days of sunshine each year, Townsville is a place where you'll enjoy cooling off—in either the Olympic-size **Tobruk Pool,** the seawater **Rockpool,** or at the beach itself. During summer (Nov–Mar), three safe swimming enclosures operate to keep swimmers safe from marine stingers, and if watersports are on your agenda try a jet ski, hire a canoe, or take to the latest in pedal skis. A state-of-the-art water park has waterfalls,

hydrants, waterslides, and water cannons, plus a huge bucket of water which continually fills until it overturns and dumps water on those below.

Don't miss the views of Cleveland Bay and Magnetic Island from Castle Hill; it's a 2.5km (1½-mile) drive or a shorter, but steep, walk up from town. To drive to the top, follow Stanley Street west from Flinders Mall to Castle Hill Drive; the walking trails up are posted en route.

**Cotters Market,** held every Sunday in Flinders Mall from 8:30am to 1pm, has 200 stalls featuring works by local and regional artists. There's everything from pottery and lead-lighting to homemade chocolates and orchids on sale.

At the **Billabong Sanctuary** (✆ **07/4778 8344;** www.billabongsanctuary.com.au) on the Bruce Highway 17km (11 miles) south of town, you can see Aussie wildlife in a natural setting; hold a koala, a (baby) crocodile, a python, or a wombat; and hand-feed kangaroos. Bring your own camera. Talks and shows run continuously starting at 8:30am; one of the most popular is the saltwater-crocodile feeding at 12:15 and 2:30pm. There are also gas barbecues, a food kiosk, and a pool you can have a dip in. Admission is A$24 (US$19) for adults, A$22 (US$18) for students, A$13 (US$10) for kids 4 to 16, and A$67 (US$54) for families of five. The sanctuary is open every day except December 25 from 8am to 5pm. To save money on cafe food, pack a picnic or barbecue supplies and eat in the pleasant grounds.

## TOWNSVILLE AFTER DARK

Not much happens until Friday and Saturday night in Townsville. The most popular of the city's lovely historical pubs, with their wrought-iron lace edged verandas, is the **Exchange,** 151 Flinders St. E. (✆ **07/4771 3335**). Choose your poison from the hip wine bar downstairs or the Western bourbon and cigar saloon upstairs; ask the bar staff to tell you about the resident ghost. Errol Flynn used to like staying at **The Australian Hotel,** 11 Palmer St. (✆ **07/4722 6999**); no doubt he knocked back a beer or two on the wide upstairs veranda, and you can, too.

**The Quarterdeck on the Marina** (✆ **07/4722 2333**), by the water, is part of Jupiters Hotel & Casino on Sir Leslie Thiess Drive, and opens on weekends only. There's karaoke Friday night, a DJ on Saturday night, and live bands on Sunday afternoon.

## A SIDE TRIP TO MAGNETIC ISLAND

8km (5 miles) E of Townsville

"Maggie" is a delightful 51-sq.-km (20-sq.-mile) national park island 20 minutes from Townsville by ferry. Only 2,500 locals live here, but it's also popular with mainlanders who love its holiday atmosphere. If you want an island interlude during your Aussie vacation but don't want to pay through the nose at the ritzy island resorts, Maggie is an ideal alternative. It is a busy little place as visitors and locals zip about between the small settlements dotted around its coast, but peace-seeking visitors will find plenty of unspoiled nature to restore their souls. Most people come for the 20 or so pristine (and amazingly uncrowded) bays and white beaches that rim the island, but hikers, botanists, and bird-watchers may want to explore the eucalyptus woods, patches of gully rainforest, and granite tors. (The island got its name when Captain Cook thought the "magnetic" rocks were interfering with his compass readings.) The place is famous for wild koalas easily spotted up in the gum trees by the side of the road; ask a local to point you to the nearest colony. Rock wallabies are often spotted in the early morning. Maggie is off the international tourist trail by and large, and it's definitely a casual kind of place, so leave your Prada stilettos in your suitcase.

**GETTING THERE & GETTING AROUND** **Sunferries** (✆ **1800/447 333** in Australia, or 07/4771 3855; www.sunferries.com.au) runs 15 round-trips a day from the Flinders Street East terminal and the Breakwater terminal on Sir Leslie Thiess Drive. Round-trip tickets are A$23 (US$18) for adults, A$12 (US$9.60) for children 5 to 15, and A$46 (US$37) for families of five. The trip takes about 25 minutes.

You can take your car on the ferry, but most people get around by renting an open-sided minimoke (similar to a golf cart) from the many rental outfits on the island. Minimokes are unlikely to go much faster than 60kmph (36 mph). **Moke Magnetic** (✆ **07/4778 5377**) rents them for around A$65 (US$52) a day. The **Magnetic Island Bus Service** (✆ **07/4778 5130**) runs a 3-hour guided tour of the island for A$35 (US$28) for adults, A$15 (US$12) for kids 5 to 15.

## Where to Stay & Dine

Magnetic Island has plenty of affordable accommodations, from motels and apartments to A-frame chalets and permanent tents. In the peak season (June–Sept), some apartments are available on a weekly basis only. Maggie is littered with inexpensive restaurants, laid-back cafes, and takeout joints.

**Maggie's Beach House** A 30-second walk to the beach and sheltered waters of Horseshoe Bay, Maggie's Beach House was purpose-built for backpackers. You can laze in a hammock under the trees or join a guided walk to spot koalas and enjoy spectacular 360-degree views of the island at sunset. Maggie's budget meals feature generous servings for A$6 to A$14 (US$4.80–US$11), which include burgers, pasta, steaks, fish, and salads. If you prefer to cook for yourself, there's a common kitchen and barbecues. There's also an Internet cafe with six computers.

Pacific Dr., Horseshoe Bay, Magnetic Island, QLD 4819. ✆ **1800/001 544** in Australia, or 07/4778 5144. Fax 07/4778 5194. www.maggiesbeachhouse.com.au. 35 units, 14 with en suite bathroom (with shower only). A$52–A$59 (US$42–US$47) single/double with shared bathroom; A$75 (US$60) double with private bathroom. Extra adult A$20 (US$16), extra child A$10 (US$8). A$21 (US$17) dorm beds. MC, V. Free pickup from all daytime ferries. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor pool; tour desk; 3 coin-op laundries. *In room:* A/C.

## Out & About on the Island

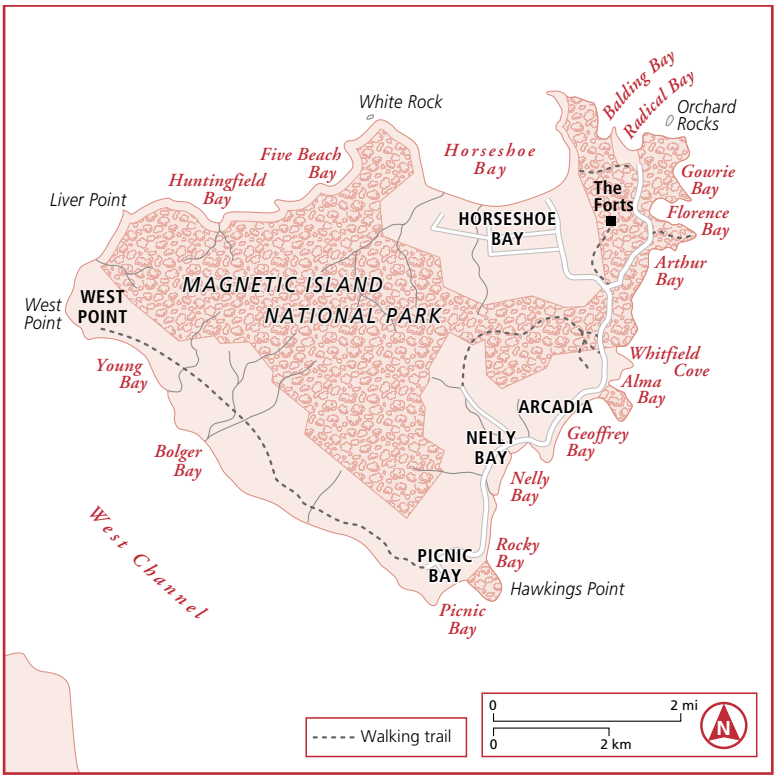
There is no end to the things you can do on Maggie—snorkeling, swimming in one of a dozen or more bays, catamaran sailing, water-skiing, parasailing, horseback riding on the beach, biking, tennis or golf, scuba diving, sea kayaking, sailing or cruising

### The Most Magnetic Experience

If you're going over to Magnetic Island for the day, pick up a copy of the free ***Magnetic Island Guide*** from any tourist information center or hotel lobby, or at the ferry terminal in Townsville before you go. Because there are so many choices of activities, it will help if you plan your day before you arrive.

There is no bank on the island, so carry cash (not every place will cash traveler's checks) and a credit card.

***Be warned:*** Marine stingers make swimming and snorkeling a bad idea from October to May except at the safe swimming enclosure at Picnic Bay. You can do watersports on top of the water, if you wear a Lycra stinger-suit, but they are quite uncomfortable in the intensely sticky summer heat from November to March.




around the island, taking a Harley Davidson tour, fishing, and more. Equipment for all these activities is for rent on the island at reasonably moderate prices.

Most activities are spread out around **Picnic Bay** (where the ferry pulls in) and the island's three settlements: **Arcadia, Nelly Bay,** and **Horseshoe Bay.**

The island is not on the Great Barrier Reef, but its waters are part of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. There's reef snorkeling at Florence Bay on the southern edge, Arthur Bay on the northern edge, and Geoffrey Bay, where you can reef-walk at low tide (wear sturdy shoes and do not walk directly on coral to avoid damaging it). First-time snorkelers will have an easy time in Maggie's weak currents and softly sloping beaches. Outside stinger season there is good swimming at many secluded bays found all around the island. Alma Bay is a good choice for families as it is reef-free and has shady lawns and a playground; Rocky Bay is a small, secluded cove.

One of the best, and most popular, of the island's 20km (12 miles) of hiking trails is the Nelly Bay–to–Arcadia trail, a one-way journey of 5km (3 miles) that takes 2½ hours. The first 45 minutes, starting in rainforest and climbing gradually to a saddle between Nelly Bay and Horseshoe, are the most interesting. Another excellent walk is the 2km (1¼-mile) trail to the Forts, remnants of World War II defenses, which, not surprisingly, have great 360-degree sea views. The best koala spotting is on the track

up to the Forts off Horseshoe Bay Road. Carry water wherever you go on the island, as some bays and hiking trails are not near shops.

If you feel like splurging, consider a jet-ski circumnavigation of the island with **Adrenalin Jet Ski Tours & Hire** (✆ **07/4778 5533**). The half-day tour on two-seat jet skis costs A$135 (US$108) per person, which includes your wet suit, life jacket, and stinger suits in season. Tours depart from Horseshoe Bay morning and afternoon. Keep your eyes peeled for dolphins, dugongs, and sea turtles.

## 5 The Whitsunday Coast & Islands

A day's drive or a 1-hour flight south of Cairns brings you to the collection of 74 islands known as the Whitsundays. No more than 3 nautical miles (5.6km/3½ miles) separates most of them, and they contain countless bays, beaches, coral reefs, and fishing spots. The water here is at least 72°F (22°C) year-round, the sun shines most of the year, and winter requires only a light jacket at night.

The islands are composed of densely forested national parkland, mostly uninhabited, and the surrounding waters belong to the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. Don't expect palm trees and coconuts; these islands are covered with dry-looking pine and eucalyptus forests full of dense undergrowth, and rocky coral coves far outnumber the few sandy beaches. More than half a dozen islands have resorts that offer many outdoor activities: snorkeling, scuba diving, sailing trips, reef fishing, water-skiing, jet-skiing, parasailing, sea kayaking, hiking, rides over the coral in semi-submersibles, fish feeding, puttering around in dinghies to secluded beaches, tennis, squash, and aqua-aerobics classes. Accommodations range from small, low-key wilderness retreats to midrange family havens to Australia's most luxurious resort, Hayman.

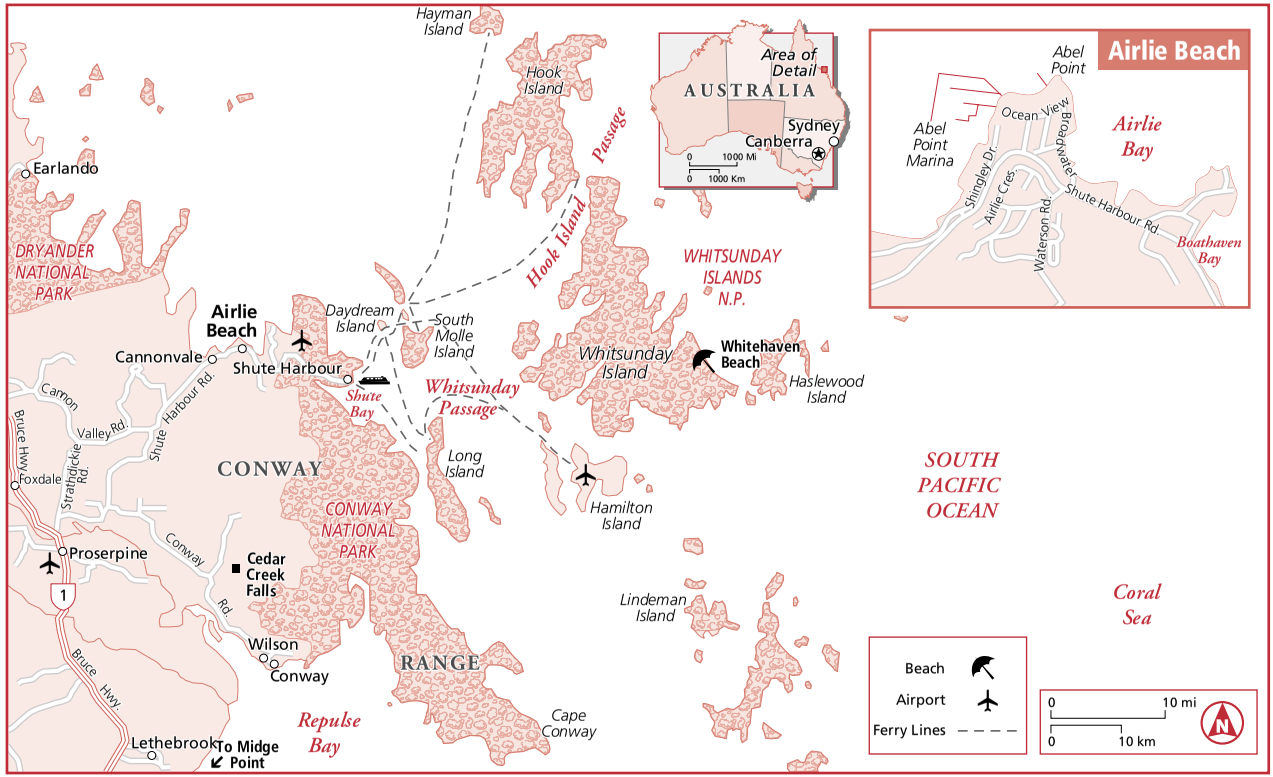
The village of **Airlie Beach** is the center of the action on the mainland. The Whitsundays are just as good a steppingstone to the outer Great Barrier Reef as Cairns—some people think it is better because you don't have to make the 90-minute trip to the Reef before you hit coral. Just about any Whitsunday island has fringing reef around its shores, and there are good snorkeling reefs between the islands, a quick boat ride away from your island or mainland accommodations.

### ESSENTIALS

**GETTING THERE** **By Car** The Bruce Highway leads south from Cairns or north from Brisbane to Proserpine, 26km (16 miles) inland from Airlie Beach. Take the "Whitsunday" turnoff to reach Airlie Beach and Shute Harbour. Allow a good 8 hours to drive from Cairns. There are several car-storage facilities at Shute Harbour. **Whitsunday Car Security** (✆ **07/4946 9666**) will collect your car anywhere in the Whitsunday area and store it in locked covered parking for A$8 (US$6.40) per day or A$14 (US$11) overnight.

### *Tips* Island or Mainland?

Does all this fun in the Whitsunday Islands come cheap? If you stay in a hotel on the mainland, yes. If you stay on an island, no. On any trip to the Whitsundays, you'll usually spend money on watersports, sailing, diving expeditions, and the like—all potential budget-busters. But standby and package deals on activities and accommodations abound most of the year, even at the most luxurious resorts.


Hayman Island
Hook Island
Passage
Earlando
DRYANDER NATIONAL PARK
Airlie Beach
Daydream Island
South Molle Island
Hook Island
WHITSUNDAY ISLANDS N.P.
Cannonvale
Shute Harbour
Shute Bay
Whitsunday Passage
Whitsunday Island
Whitehaven Beach
Haslewood Island
Carnon Valley Rd.
Shute Harbour Rd.
Bruce Hwy
Foxdale
Strathdickie Rd.
CONWAY
Long Island
SOUTH PACIFIC OCEAN
CONWAY NATIONAL PARK
Hamilton Island
Proserpine
Cedar Creek Falls
Conway Rd.
Lindeman Island
Coral Sea
Wilson
Conway
RANGE
Bruce Hwy
Repulse Bay
Cape Conway
Lethebrook
To Midge Point
Area of Detail
AUSTRALIA
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Abel Point
Airlie Beach
Abel Point Marina
Ocean View Rd
Airlie Bay
Shingley Dr.
Airlie Cres.
Waterson Rd.
Shute Harbour Rd
Boathaven Bay
Beach
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**By Plane** There are two air routes into the Whitsundays: Hamilton Island Airport and Whitsunday Coast Airport at Proserpine on the mainland. **QantasLink** (✆ **13 13 13** in Australia, or 800/227-4500 in the U.S. and Canada; www.qantas.com.au) flies direct to Hamilton Island from Cairns and Townsville. **Virgin Blue** (✆ **13 67 89** in Australia, or 07/3295 2296) flies to Proserpine direct from Brisbane, Melbourne, and Sydney, and with connections from Canberra, Adelaide, Hobart, and Launceston. **Jetstar** (✆ **13 15 38** in Australia, or 03/8341 4901) flies from Brisbane and Sydney to Proserpine and from Brisbane, Melbourne, and Sydney to Hamilton Island. If you stay on an island, the resort may book your launch transfers automatically. These may appear on your airline ticket, in which case your luggage will be checked through to the island.

**By Train** Several **Queensland Rail** (✆ **13 22 32** in Queensland, or 07/3235 1122; www.qr.com.au) long-distance trains stop at Proserpine every week. The one-way fare from Cairns on the Tilt Train is A$134 (US$107). Brisbane fares range from A$228 (US$182) on the Tilt Train to A$327 (US$262) for a first-class sleeper on the *Sunlander* or A$606 (US$485) for the all-inclusive Queenslander Class service.

**By Bus** **Greyhound Australia** (✆ **13 14 99** in Australia, or 07/4690 9950) operates plentiful daily services to Airlie Beach from Brisbane (trip time: around 19 hr.) and Cairns (trip time: 10 hr.). The fare is A$149 (US$119) from Brisbane and A$93 (US$74) from Cairns.

**Whitsunday Transit** (✆ **07/4946 1800**) meets all flights and trains at Proserpine and provides door-to-door transfers to Airlie Beach hotels or to Shute Harbour. The fare from the airport is A$30 (US$24) to Airlie Beach or A$32 (US$26) to Shute Harbour. From the train station, it is A$15 (US$12) to Airlie Beach or A$18 (US$14) to Shute Harbour.

**VISITOR INFORMATION** Before you travel, contact **Tourism Whitsundays,** P.O. Box 83, Whitsunday, QLD 4802 (www.whitsundaytourism.com). The **Whitsundays Information Centre** (✆ **1800/801 252** in Australia, or 07/4945 3711; fax 07/4945 3182) is in Proserpine, on the Bruce Highway in the town's south. It's open Monday to Friday from 8:30am to 5pm and weekends and public holidays (except Dec 25) from 9am to 3pm. Another useful website is www.whitsunday.net.au.

If you're staying in Airlie Beach, it's easier to pick up information from the private booking agents lining the main street, which all stock a vast range of cruise, tour, and hotel information, and make bookings free of charge. They all have much the same stuff; but because some work with certain boats exclusively, and prices can vary a little from one to the next, shop around.

**GETTING AROUND** Island ferries and Great Barrier Reef cruises leave from **Shute Harbour,** a 10-minute drive south of Airlie Beach on Shute Harbour Road. Most other tour-boat operators and bareboat charters anchor at **Abel Point Marina,** a 15-minute walk west from Airlie Beach.

**Avis** (✆ **07/4946 6318**), **Hertz** (✆ **07/4946 4687**), and **Thrifty** (✆ **07/4946 7727**) have outlets in Airlie Beach and Proserpine Airport (telephone numbers serve both locations). Budget has no Whitsunday office.

**Whitsunday Transit** (✆ **07/4946 1800**) runs half-hourly buses between Airlie Beach and Shute Harbour to meet all ferries. The fare is A$4.55 (US$3.65). An **Explorer Pass,** good for unlimited travel between Shute Harbour, Airlie Beach, Cannonvale, and Proserpine from 6am to 10:30pm on the date of issue, costs A$8 (US$6.40) for adults and A$4 (US$3.20) for children.

### Tips Water Hazards!

Although there have been no major stinging incidents in areas with stinger nets since their introduction in the early 1980s, deadly marine stingers may inhabit the shoreline from October to April. The best place to swim during these months is in the man-made Airlie Beach lagoon.

The rivers here are home to dangerous saltwater crocodiles (which actually live in freshwater), so no swimming in streams, rivers, and water holes.

Most tour-boat operators pick up guests free from Airlie Beach hotels and pick up at some or all island resorts.

**Fantasea Cruises' Blue Ferries** (✆ **1800/650 851** in Australia, or 07/4946 5111) makes ferry transfers from Shute Harbour to the islands and between the islands. One-way transfers from the mainland cost adults A$19 (US$15) to South Molle, Long, and Daydream islands; A$30 (US$24) to Hamilton Island. Children 4 to 14 pay A$12 (US$9.60) and A$15 (US$12). Reservations are not necessary, but do book your arrival and departure ferry so that you don't miss your connections. Most islands receive a boat only every 2 to 4 hours, so it's a long wait if you miss your boat.

## CHOOSING A BASE

Many people like to combine a stay at Airlie Beach with a few days on an island. The advantages of staying on the mainland are cheaper accommodations, a choice of restaurants, and freedom to visit a different island each day. There is jet-skiing, kayaking, parasailing, catamaran hire, and wind surfing on the mainland.

The main advantage of staying on an island is that swimming, snorkeling, bushwalking, and watersports—many of them free—are right outside your door. You won't be isolated if you stay on an island, as most reef cruise boats, "sail and snorkel" yacht excursions, Whitehaven Beach cruises, dive boats, fishing vessels, and so on stop at the island resorts on a frequent basis. Be warned, however, that once you're "captive" on an island, you may be slugged with high food and drink prices. Bear in mind, too, that although most island resorts offer non-motorized watersports, such as windsurfing and catamarans, for free, you will pay for activities that use fuel, such as parasailing, water-skiing, and dinghy rental.

In some places in the islands, extreme low tides may reveal rocky mud flats below the sand line. Watersports can be limited at low tide because of the low water level.

## EXPLORING THE ISLANDS

**SAILING & SNORKELING TRIPS** A cheaper alternative to skippering your own yacht around the Whitsundays is to join one of the numerous yachts offering 3-day, 2-night sailing adventures around the islands. You can get involved with sailing the boat as much or as little as you want, snorkel over one dazzling reef after another, beachcomb, explore national park trails, learn to sail if you want, call at secluded bays, swim, sunbathe, and generally have a laid-back good time. A few companies offer introductory and qualified scuba diving for an extra cost per dive. Most boats carry a maximum of 12 passengers, so the atmosphere is always friendly and fun. The food is generally good, the showers are usually hot, and you sleep in comfortable but small berths off the galley. Some have petite private twin or double cabins.

In peak season, expect to pay around A$600 (US$480) per person. Prices usually include all meals, Marine Park entrance fees, snorkel gear, and transfers to the departure point (Abel Point Marina or Shute Harbour). In the off season, the boats compete fiercely for passengers; you'll see signboards on the main street in Airlie Beach advertising standby deals. Among the better-known operators are ***Ragamuffin*** (✆ **07/4946 7777**), a 17m (56-ft.) oceangoing yacht, and **Prosail** (✆ **1800/810 116** in Australia, or 07/4946 5433; www.prosail.com.au), which runs trips on a fleet of 19 yachts. Prosail also offers 3-hour "day sails" on America's Cup yachts *Australia* and *Steak 'N Kidney,* giving you the chance to "race" in a mock challenge between the two boats. You can get involved in the racing, calling tactics, grinding, and even protesting an offending yacht, or just sit back and watch the action. Day sails start at 9am and 1pm, and cost A$79 (US$63) for adults, A$75 (US$60) for students and YHA members, and A$59 (US$47) for children 10 to 15 (not recommended for children under 10), including pickup from your accommodations. Prosail's 3-day, 2-night guided sailing trips through the Marine and Great Barrier Reef Marine parks cost around A$450 (US$360). All trips include sailing, snorkeling, scuba diving, and bushwalking, and you can sail on maxi-yachts such as *Matador, Condor, Broomstick,* and *Hammer.* The company also offers 6-day packages. Contact **Tourism Whitsundays** (see "Visitor Information," above) for details on other charters.

**ISLAND HOPPING** Day-trippers to Hamilton, Daydream, South Molle, Club Crocodile Long Island, and Hook Island resorts can rent the hotels' watersports equipment, laze by the beaches and pools, scuba dive, join the resorts' activities programs, hike their trails, and eat at their restaurants. See "The Whitsunday Island Resorts," later in this chapter, for details on where to stay. Club Crocodile Long Island is a rather noisy, unpretentious resort that has plentiful watersports, picturesque hiking trails, wild wallabies, and a large beach–cum–tidal flat where you can relax on sun lounges.

You can get to the islands on your own by ferry (see "Getting Around," above) or take an organized day trip that visits one, two, or even three islands in a day. **Fantasea Cruises** (✆ **1800/650 851** in Australia, or 07/4946 5111; www.fantasea.com.au) and **Whitsunday Island Adventure Cruises** (✆ **07/4946 5255** for the booking agent) all offer them, as do several yachts.

**Hamilton Island,** 16km (9½ miles) southeast of Shute Harbour, is one of the most developed islands, and its resort (see "The Whitsunday Island Resorts," below) has the widest range of activities, including coral snorkeling (at low tide), parasailing, waterskiing, windsurfing, speedboat rides, sailing and fishing trips to nearby islets, tennis and squash, go-karts, a shooting range, minigolf, and an aquatic driving range. There

### *Value* When to Look for Whitsunday Deals

High season in the Whitsundays is during school vacations: mid-April, late June to early July, late September to early October, late December, and all of January. The Aussie winter from June to August is tight, too. You have to book months ahead to get high-season accommodations, but any other time you can get very good deals indeed. Specials on accommodations, sailing trips, day cruises, and diving excursions leap off the blackboards outside the tour-booking agents in Airlie Beach.

### *Moments* Hitting the Sand at Whitehaven Beach

The 6km (3¾-mile) stretch of pure-white silica sand on **Whitehaven Beach** ★★ will leave you in rapture. The beach, on uninhabited Whitsunday Island, does not boast a lot of coral, but the swimming is good, and the forested shore is beautiful. Take a book and chill out. Some sailboat day trips visit it, as do several motorized vessel operators, including **Fantasea Cruises** (**1800/650 851** in Australia, or 07/4946 5111; www.fantasea.com.au). Expect to pay around A$80 (US$64) per person for the day, with lunch.

are hiking trails, including a challenging trek up Passage Peak for panoramic views; a 1-hour bus tour that includes a stop at the island's small fauna park, which has koalas and other wildlife; and a free-form pool with lots of lounge chairs. Because the resort is spread out and divided by a steep hill, take advantage of the free shuttle service to get around. Renting a golf cart is expensive: A$35 (US$28) per hour or A$75 (US$60) per 24 hours. There's a bakery, deli, and some cheap pizza/cafe/burger-style options among the resort's 10 restaurants, and almost as many bars.

**South Molle Island,** 7km (4¼ miles) from Shute Harbour, is a pretty island covered with rainforests and open grassland, with an unpretentious resort (see "The Whitsunday Island Resorts," below). Visitors can golf on the 9-hole course; use the catamarans, windsurfers, and paddle skis; go parasailing, water-skiing, or jet-skiing; laze on the palm-lined beach or by the pool and Jacuzzi; or hike 16km (9½ miles) of national park walking trails, including a steep climb to Spion Kop peak for fabulous 360-degree views of the Whitsundays. Free fish-feeding takes place on the jetty at 10am and rainbow lorikeet-feeding is at 3pm. You can take a speedboat to nearby reefs for a guided snorkel safari or rent a dinghy to putter around the shore to a secluded snorkeling or fishing spot. The coffee shop serves inexpensive meals, and there's a bar.

**Daydream Island,** 8km (5 miles) from Shute Harbour, is a popular day-trip choice because it has a good patch of coral reef just offshore. A rainforest walk stretches almost the entire length of the kilometer-long (just over half a mile) island; other activities include snorkeling, sailboarding, jet-skiing, parasailing, coral viewing, reef fishing, diving and dive school, tennis, volleyball, and minigolf.

Day-trippers to **Long Island Club Crocodile Resort** (see "The Whitsunday Island Resorts," below), 10km (6 miles) from Shute Harbour, can rent watersports equipment and use the resort's beach, Jacuzzi, gym and sauna, volleyball court, basketball court, table tennis tables, and tennis courts. You can hike 20km (12 miles) of rainforest trails, swim in two pools, and snorkel among the modest coral in the bay.

**Hook Island** (see "The Whitsunday Island Resorts," below), 40km (24 miles) from Shute Harbour, is a good day-trip destination for snorkelers. A day trip (✆ **07/4946 5255** for bookings) costs A$80 (US$64) and also visits Long Island and Whitehaven Beach on Whitsunday Island. It includes snorkel gear and admission to the underwater observatory on Hook Island.

## MORE OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES

**FISHING** Reef fishing is superb throughout the islands; red emperor, coral trout, sweetlip, and snapper are common catches. One of the most popular charter vessels is the 16m (52-ft.) timber cruiser ***Moruya*** (✆ **07/4946 7127,** or 0415/185 653 mobile;

www1.whitsundaysonline.com/mvmoruya.php). Day trips depart Shute Harbour daily at 9:30am and return at 5:30pm. They include lunch, bait, and fishing rods. The crew will even clean your catch for you. Adults pay A$120 (US$96), seniors A$110 (US$88), children 4 to 14 A$75 (US$60), and families of four A$315 (US$252).

The 12m (39-ft.) ***Marlin Blue*** (✆ **07/4946 5044,** or 0427/009 575 mobile) takes reef and game anglers out from Abel Point Marina and South Molle Island Resort for A$245 (US$196) per person for a full day on a shared charter. That includes lunch, bait, and tackle; drinks are extra. The boat departs the mainland at 7am and returns around 5:30pm.

If you want to undertake your own fishing expedition, **Harbourside Boat Hire**, in Shute Harbour (✆ **07/4946 9330**), rents motorized dinghies for A$60 (US$48) for a half-day or A$90 (US$72) for a full day. Half-cabin cruisers cost A$90 (US$72) for a half-day, A$150 (US$120) for a full day. It also rents fishing rods and sells tackle, bait, ice, and all your fishing needs.

**ECOTOURS** Visitors to the Whitsundays can get up close and personal with crocodiles with **Whitsunday Crocodile Safaris** (book through Fantasea Cruises; ✆ **1800/650 851** in Australia, or 07/4946 5111; www.fantasea.com.au), which combines an open-air wagon ride through the pristine Goorganga wetlands and a boat trip on the river to learn more about one of Queensland's major crocodile-breeding grounds. This is the only place to see crocs in safety in the wild south of the Daintree. Bus pickups operate from Airlie Beach, Cannonvale, and Proserpine for the tours, which run about 4 hours, depending on tides, and cost A$85 (US$68) for adults, A$55 (US$44) for kids 4 to 14, and A$219 (US$175) for families of four. Back on land, you'll enjoy billy tea, the best damper I've ever tasted (and they'll even give you the recipe), and a talk on native wildlife over a barbecue lunch.

**HIKING & 4WD SAFARIS** The hills behind Airlie Beach stretch into nearby Conway State Forest and are rich in giant strangler figs, ferns, and palms. If you're lucky you'll spot a blue Ulysses butterfly. Several companies offer half-day 4WD safaris. Hiking trails ranging in length from 1km (just over .5 mile) to 5.4km (3.75 miles) lead through the forest or down to the beach in Conway National Park, which spans Shute Harbour Road between Airlie Beach and Shute Harbour. One trail has signboards explaining the Aboriginal uses of the plants you are passing; several trails offer impressive views of the islands. The trails depart from one of three parking lots along Shute Harbour Road. **The Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service information center** (✆ **07/4946 7022**) on Shute Harbour Road at Mandalay Road, 2.5 km (1½ miles) northeast of Airlie Beach, has maps and self-guiding brochures; it's open

### *Moments* Whale-Watching in the Whitsundays

Humpback whales migrate to the Whitsundays every July to September to calve. These leviathans come right up to the boat. **Fantasea Cruises** (✆ **1800/650 851** in Australia, or 07/4946 5111; www.fantasea.com.au) runs whale-watching cruises in season; trips feature an onboard whale talk and videos. The cost is about A$101 (US$81) for adults, A$91 (US$73) for students and seniors, and A$51 (US$41) for children (4–14). If you don't see any whales, you can go again another day for free or choose another of Fantasea's cruises.

### Tips Great Whitsunday Walking

The Whitsundays Great Walk—one of six **Great Walks of Queensland**—covers 36km (22 miles) in Conway State Forest and Conway National Park, behind Airlie Beach. The trail starts in the parking lot at the end of Brandy Creek Road, a short drive from Cannonvale, and winds in three stages from Brandy Creek to Airlie Beach, with two campsites at 12km (7.5-mile) intervals. The hills here are rich in giant strangler figs, ferns, and palms, and if you're lucky, you'll spot a giant blue Ulysses butterfly. Walkers should carry drinking water because the water in natural systems is not good for drinking.

The Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service information center, Shute Harbour Road at Mandalay Road (✆ **07/4946 7022)** 2.5km (1½ miles) northeast of Airlie Beach, has more information on this and other, shorter walks. It's open Monday through Friday from 8:30am to 5pm and most, but not all, Saturdays from 9am to 1pm.

Other Great Walks are on Fraser Island (p. 339), the Wet Tropics near Cairns, the Sunshine Coast hinterland, the Gold Coast hinterland, and near Mackay. For more details on all walks, visit the Queensland Environmental Protection Agency's website (www.epa.qld.gov.au).

Monday through Friday from 8am to 5pm and most, but not all, Saturdays from 9am to 1pm.

**SEA KAYAKING** ★ If you have strong arms, sea kayaking is a wonderful way to enjoy the islands. Daydream Island and the beaches and bays of the North, Mid, and South Molle group of islands are all within paddling distance of the mainland. It's common to see dolphins, turtles, and sharks along the way. One long-established operator is **Salty Dog Sea Kayaking** (✆ **07/4946 1388;** www.saltydog.com.au), which takes escorted trips through the islands. Half-day trips run on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Saturday, and full-day trips on Monday, Thursday, and Friday, departing Airlie Beach at 8:30am. A half-day trip is A$58 (US$46) per person, and a day trip is A$115 (US$92). Three- and 6-day trips, during which you camp out, are A$395 (US$316) and A$1,190 (US$952). All rates include snorkel gear, meals, hotel pickup, and, on overnight trips, camping gear. The company also delivers sea kayaks anywhere in the Whitsundays. The price of a full day's rental starts at A$50 (US$40) for a single kayak, A$60 (US$48) for a double, including delivery and pickup and all safety equipment. A security deposit of A$200 (US$160) is required for rentals.

**WATERSPORTS** Airlie Beach is not great for swimming or snorkeling, but you can rent jet skis, WaveRunners, windsurfers, aquabikes, pedal cats, catamarans, and paddle skis to use on the bay. Choose from the several rental outfits along the beach.

## AIRLIE BEACH

640km (384 miles) S of Cairns; 1,146km (687 miles) N of Brisbane

The town of Airlie Beach, only a few blocks long, is the focal point of activity on the Whitsunday mainland. It has some decent accommodations, a small selection of good restaurants and bars, a boutique or two, and facilities such as banks and a supermarket. Cruises and yachts depart from either Shute Harbour, a 10-minute drive south on

Shute Harbour Road, or Abel Point Marina, a 10-minute walk west along the shore or a quick drive over the hill on Shute Harbour Road.

Airlie Beach has an artificial lagoon, offset by sandy beaches and landscaped parkland, which resolves the problem of where to swim in stinger season. The lagoon is the size of about six full-size Olympic swimming pools, set in 4 hectares (10 acres) of botanic gardens, with a children's pool, plenty of shade, barbecues, picnic shelters, toilets and showers, and parking.

Perched on the edge of the Coral Sea, with views across Pioneer Bay and the Whitsunday Passage, Airlie Beach has a village atmosphere where life revolves around the beach and the marina by day, and the bars and restaurants by night.

The spit of land between Airlie Bay and Boathaven Bay is home to the **Airlie Beach Sailing Club.** Shute Harbour, 11km (7 miles) from Airlie Beach, is one of Queensland's busiest ports, filled with yachts, cruisers, water taxis, ferries, and fishermen. For a bird's-eye view, head to the **Lions Lookout.**

## WHERE TO STAY

### Airlie Beach Hotel

Extensively refurbished in mid-2000, the hotel is in the middle of town and right next to the beach. The older motel units have been joined by 60 beachfront units, including 4 suites, which all have private balconies and bathtubs. Suites have full kitchen facilities. Mangrove Jack's restaurant (see "Where to Dine," below) is a fixture on the Airlie Beach scene, with Capers bar and grill, overlooking the beach, adding a second eating spot. Capers turns into a late-night dance bar after 10pm.

The Esplanade and Coconut Grove, Airlie Beach, QLD 4802. ✆ **1800/466 233** in Australia, or 07/4964 1999. Fax 07/4964 1998. www.airliebeachhotel.com.au. 80 units (20 with shower only). A$109–A$148 (US$87–US$118) double for motel units; A$159–A$218 (US$127–US$174) double for hotel rooms; A$258 (US$206) suites. AE, DC, MC, V. Free secure covered parking. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; 2 bars; outdoor saltwater pool; tour desk; coin-op laundry. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, kitchen (in suites only), coffeemaker.

### Boathaven Spa Resort

These well-appointed studios, apartments (some with private Jacuzzi), and penthouses are set among lovely gardens only 300m (984 ft.) from town. All apartments have balconies with views over Boathaven Bay and the Coral Sea. The decor is attractive, with big living areas, kitchenettes, and a bathroom for each bedroom. The "spa suites" and penthouses include laundry facilities and a Jacuzzi on the balcony.

440 Shute Harbour Rd., Airlie Beach, QLD 4802. ✆ **07/4948 4948.** Fax 07/4948 4999. www.boathavenresort.com. 27 units (all with shower; 12 with Jacuzzis). A$150 (US$120) double studio; A$150–A$185 (US$120–US$148) suites; A$165 (US$132) double spa studio; A$279 (US$223) 2-bedroom apt; A$365 (US$292) 2-bedroom penthouse (sleeps 4); A$490 (US$392) 3-bedroom penthouse (sleeps 6). Extra adult A$25 (US$20), extra child under 15 A$15 (US$12). Crib A$10 (US$8). Minimum stay of 3–5 nights applies over Christmas, New Year, and Easter holiday periods. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking (some covered). **Amenities:** 2 large outdoor pools; gymnasium; Jacuzzi; game room; tour desk; coin-op laundry. *In room:* A/C, TV, kitchenette, hair dryer, iron, laundry (in penthouses only).

### Whitsunday Wanderers Resort

Set in 7 hectares (18 acres) of tropical gardens on the main street of Airlie Beach, this resort fits right in with the laid-back Airlie lifestyle. Accommodations are scattered around the grounds in blocks of four to eight rooms with open-air parking. The decor is old-fashioned, but you get plenty of space, a kitchenette, a decent-size bathroom, and a big balcony or patio. Hair dryers are on loan at reception. This is a good choice for families as there is plenty of room for the kids to run around, barbecues to cook on, an 18-hole minigolf course, archery, table tennis, volleyball, half- and full-size tennis courts, several pools, and a kids' playground, among other activities. All are free, and there's also a free kids' club during vacations.

Shute Harbour Rd., Airlie Beach, QLD 4802. ✆ **1800/075 060** in Australia, or 07/4946 6446. Fax 07/4946 6761. 104 units (102 with shower only). A$98–A$138 (US$78–US$110) double; A$142–A$149 (US$114–US$119) honeymoon suites (with spa bath). Free crib. Ask about packages, and packages that include meals. AE, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; 3 outdoor pools and children's pool; 5 tennis courts (3 are lit for night play); Jacuzzi; gymnasium; children's playground; tour desk; babysitting; coin-op laundry. *In room:* A/C, TV w/free movies, kitchenette, fridge, iron, safe.

## WORTH A SPLURGE

**Coral Sea Resort** ✭ In Airlie Beach's best location, on the edge of Paradise Point, with 280-degree views of the ocean, this 6-year-old resort is one of the best places to stay on the Whitsunday mainland. The wide range of great accommodations styles suits everyone from honeymooners to families, and although it's relatively sprawling, the design is such that you can easily feel you're alone. All the rooms have a nautical feel. There are four styles of suites, apartments, and family units. The Coral Sea suites are divine, complete with a Jacuzzi and double hammock on the balcony. Bayview suites have a Jacuzzi inside. It's a 3-minute walk along the waterfront to Airlie Beach village.

25 Oceanview Ave., Airlie Beach, QLD 4802. ✆ **1800/075 061** in Australia, or 07/4946 6458. Fax 07/4946 6516. www.coralsearesort.com.au. 78 units. A$210–A$265 (US$168–US$212) double; A$285–A$345 (US$228–US$276) suite; A$295 (US$236) 1-bedroom apt; A$310–A$340 (US$248–US$272) 2-bedroom apt; A$310 (US$248) family unit for up to 5; A$340 (US$272) 1-bedroom penthouse; A$440 (US$352) 2-bedroom penthouse; A$610 (US$488) 3-bedroom penthouse. Extra person A$30 (US$24). Crib A$12 (US$9.60). 3-night minimum at Easter and Dec 26–Jan 5. Ask about packages. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; 25m (82-ft.) outdoor pool; exercise room; game room; tour desk; car-rental desk; 24-hr. room service; massage; babysitting; coin-op laundry; dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV w/satellite and free movies, kitchenette, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

**South Long Island Nature Lodge** ✭✭ This lodge was designed to show off the Whitsundays' natural beauty. Tucked in a cove under towering hoop pines and palms, it is an environmentally sensitive establishment on a national park island. It appeals to people who want to explore the wilderness in basic comfort, without the crowds, noisy watersports, or artificial atmosphere of a resort. It's also a great place to meet other travelers. A maximum of 10 guests stay in simple but smart cabins facing the sea, each with a double and single bed, modern bathroom, and private deck facing the sea. Solar power rules, so there is no air-conditioning or TVs, hair dryers, irons, or other appliances. There is one public phone. Social life centers on an open-sided gazebo by the beach, equipped with a natural-history library and CDs, where everyone dines together at slab tables under the Milky Way on fabulous buffet-style campfire meals. Access is only by a short but stunning helicopter flight from Hamilton Island.

Daily excursions include sailing away on the lodge's gleaming 10m (33-ft.) catamaran, a helicopter flight to the Outer Reef and Whitehaven Beach, sea kayaking the mangroves to spot giant green sea turtles (which are common around the lodge), snorkeling the fringing reef on uninhabited islands, or bushwalking to a magical milkwood grove no one else knows about. Or you may prefer to just laze in a hammock or head off with a free sea kayak and snorkel gear. The beach is more tidal flat than sand, but clean and firm enough to sunbathe on. Wildlife abounds, including Myrtle, the lodge's pet kangaroo. Those who stay on this 1,215-hectare (3,001-acre) island consider it a plus that no ferries or cruise boats stop here and that the lodge is inaccessible to day-trippers.

Paradise Bay, Long Island (16km/10 miles southeast of Shute Harbour), Whitsunday Islands (P.O. Box 842, Airlie Beach, QLD 4802). ✆ **07/4946 9777.** Fax 07/4946 9777. www.southlongisland.com. 5 units (all with shower only). A$3,439 (US$2,751) per person for a minimum 5-night stay. A$460 (US$368) per person extra nights. No single supplement. Rates include all meals, helicopter transfers from Hamilton Island Airport, daily excursions, and equipment. Children under 14 not accepted. MC, V. *In room:* Fridge, coffeemaker, no phone.

## WHERE TO DINE

**Mamma's Boys & Boardwalk Ethnic Kitchen** INTERNATIONAL FOOD COURT Eating in Airlie is all about being casual, and you won't find a nicer place to hang out than under the old tree in this street-side courtyard. Fetch a big, tasty meal from the food court next door and eat at one of the timber tables under the tree. Go for Thai, Chinese, or Malaysian noodles; barbecued prime ribs; a beef kabob with spicy peanut sauce; a char-grilled seafood pizza; catch of the day battered or crumbed—you get the picture. A band plays most nights. The food court also does takeout.

In and next to Magnum's Backpacker's & Bar, 366 Shute Harbour Rd. ✆ **07/4948 2922.** Menu items A$3–A$15 (US$2.40–US$12); many meals under A$10 (US$8). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11am–late.

**Mangrove Jack's Café Bar** PIZZA/CAFE FARE Bareboat sailors, local sugar farmers, Sydney yuppies, and European backpackers all flock to this big, open-fronted sports bar and restaurant. The mood is upbeat and pleasantly casual, the surroundings are spick-and-span, and the food passes muster. Wood-fired pizza with trendy toppings is the specialty. There is no table service; place your order at the bar and collect your food when your number is called. More than 50 wines come by the glass.

In the Airlie Beach Hotel, 16 The Esplanade (enter from Shute Harbour Rd.). ✆ **07/4946 6233.** Reservations recommended. Main courses A$7.90–A$20 (US$6.30–US$16). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 10am–midnight.

## THE WHITSUNDAY ISLAND RESORTS

Almost no island resort in the Whitsundays comes cheap. There are about 10 resorts of varying degrees of splendor; accommodations range from positively glitzy to comfortably midrange to downright old-fashioned.

Of the full-service resorts, **Long Island Club Crocodile** and **South Molle Island Resort** represent the best value, as you can opt for rates that include all meals. Both islands' rates also include a lot of activities. As a rule, non-motorized activities and watersports such as catamarans, windsurfers, and paddle skis are free, while you pay extra for activities that use fuel, such as parasailing or water-skiing. Of the two resorts, South Molle is prettier and a tad more upscale than Long Island Club Crocodile.

If you're looking for an alternative to the "big" island resorts, consider the quiet, low-key affairs tucked away under the palms. These resorts have few facilities and no extras such as day trips to the Great Barrier Reef, fishing expeditions, dive excursions, or sail-and-snorkel trips. But that suits their quiet, nature-loving guests just fine.

**Hook Island Wilderness Resort** This humble collection of cabins and campsites on a white sandy beach is one of the few really affordable island resorts on the Great Barrier Reef. That makes it popular with backpackers and anybody who just wants to dive, rent canoes, play beach volleyball, visit the underwater observatory, hike, fish in the four-person flat-bottom boat, laze in the pool and Jacuzzi, or chill out. Good snorkeling is footsteps from shore, and the resort's dive center conducts first-time and regular dives off the beach. Hook is a national park and the second-largest Whitsunday island. The cabins are very basic, with beds or bunks sleeping six or eight. All come with fresh bed linens; bring your own bath towels. A store sells essentials for campers, but the camp kitchen is not available to guests staying in cabins or bunkhouses.

Hook Island (40km/25 miles northeast of Shute Harbour), Whitsunday Islands. (P.M.B. 23, Mackay, QLD 4741.) ✆ **07/4946 9380.** Fax 07/4946 9470. www.hookislandresort.com. 20 tent sites; 2 10-bed dormitories; 10 cabins, 4 with bathroom (shower only). A$89 (US$71) cabin without bathroom double; extra adult A$35 (US$28), extra child 4–14 A$22 (US$18). A$130 (US$104) cabin with bathroom double; extra adult A$40 (US$32), extra child A$30

(US$24). Dorm bed A$35 (US$28) adult, A$20 (US$16) child 4–14. Tent site A$25 (US$20) adult, A$15 (US$12) child 4–14. Ask about packages. MC, V. Transfers from mainland A$36 (US$29) per person, round-trip. Boat leaves Shute Harbour 9am, Hook Island 3pm (trip time: 1 hr). Book through resort. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor pool; Jacuzzi; watersports equipment (snorkel gear, canoes, sea kayaks); tour desk. *In room:* A/C, fridge, coffeemaker.

**Long Island Club Crocodile** Club Croc is probably the most unpretentious of all the Whitsunday resorts, and its package deals make it popular with families and young couples. It faces a wide, curving bay that has good reef snorkeling. Lots of beachfront watersports await: catamaran sailing, windsurfing, surf skiing, jet-skiing, water-skiing, scuba diving, and more. You can join organized activities, like jet-ski races, or do your own thing. Entertainment can be anything from a raging dance club to casino games, live bands, karaoke, talent shows, or cane toad races. Other free activities include aerobics, beach and pool volleyball, basketball, table tennis, and tennis. There are also 20km (12 miles) of national park trails where you often see wallabies. There's a kids' playground and a free Kids' Club for 4- to 14-year-olds.

The beachfront rooms have a Mediterranean look, with glass-louver windows and a view of the sea through the trees. Garden rooms, behind the beachfront rooms, are a little older and darker. Both types have air-conditioning, minifridges, TVs, telephones, Internet access, and patios or balconies. Beachfront rooms also have a minibar and safe. Your best value, however, are the appealing lodge rooms, which have polished timber floors, freshly painted walls, and a fan (but no bathroom, telephone, or view). They're compact but nice if you just want a bed and don't mind shared bathroom facilities. They have no air-conditioning, so take them only from April to October. Hair dryers are available at reception. There's nothing fancy about the food in the seafront buffet restaurant, so you may want to buy a barbecue-it-yourself meat pack from the little cafe. Casual is the byword here—pack your old surf shorts.

Whitsunday Passage, Whitsunday Islands, P.O. Box 1080, Airlie Beach, QLD 4802. ✆ **1800/075 125** in Australia, or 07/4946 9400. Fax 07/4946 9555. www.clubcroc.com.au. 156 units, 140 with bathroom (shower only). A$320 (US$256) lodge room (sleeps 4); A$298–A$380 (US$238–US$304) double garden room; A$348–A$430 (US$278–US$344) double beachfront room. Children 3–16 A$65 (US$52) per child. Rates include all meals. Ask about packages. AE, DC, MC, V. Fantasea Cruises (✆ **07/4946 5111**) provides 30-min. launch transfers from Shute Harbour for A$40 (US$32) adults, A$26 (US$21) children 4–14 round-trip. **Amenities:** Restaurant; cafe; bar; 2 outdoor pools; tennis courts; gym; Jacuzzi; sauna; tour desk; salon; babysitting; coin-op laundry. *In room:* A/C (except lodges), TV, fridge, minibar (in beachfront rooms), dataport, safe (in beachfront rooms), iron.

**Palm Terrace, Hamilton Island** This is the best value option for visitors to ritzy Hamilton Island. More than A$2.3 million (US$1.8 million) was spent in 2001 converting an existing lodge into this budget hotel set in quiet gardens near Catseye Beach. About a third of the rooms have uninterrupted ocean and beach views. The island has four other hotels, ranging from private bungalows to a five-star luxury Beach Club, as well as a choice of privately owned apartments and luxury villas. The rooms in Palm Terrace are large and have big balconies. Each sleeps three and has a king-size bed as well as a choice of double sofa bed or a single bed with a trundle. Guests have free use of non-motorized watercraft. Families staying in the Palm Terrace can take advantage of the "Kids Stay, Play, and Eat for Free" program, which includes free accommodations for children under 15 (using existing bedding), admission to the Clownfish Club (small charge for children under 3), and free meals in a selection of the island's restaurants when dining with their parents.

Hamilton Island Resort, Hamilton Island (16km/10 miles southeast of Shute Harbour), Whitsunday Islands, QLD 4803. ✆ **1800/075 110** in Australia, 02/8353 8444 (reservations office in Sydney), or 07/4946 9999 (the island). Fax

02/8353 8499 (reservations office in Sydney) or 07/4946 8888 (the island). www.hamiltonisland.com.au. 60 units, all with bathroom (shower only). A$260–A$306 (US$208–US$245) per room per night (all units sleep 3). Ask about packages. AE, DC, MC, V. Free airport-resort transfers for all guests. Fantasea Cruises (✆ **1800/650 851** in Australia, or 07/4946 5111) provides the cheapest transfers from the mainland (Shute Harbour) and most other islands. **Amenities:** 10 restaurants; 7 bars; 6 outdoor pools; minigolf and driving range; day/night tennis courts; health club and spa; extensive range of watersports and activities; bike rental; childcare center for kids from 6 weeks to 14 years (in 3 groups); tour desk; business center; secretarial services; shopping arcade; salon; massage; babysitting; coin-op laundry. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

**South Molle Island Resort** This is a good-value choice. It's not glamorous, but many activities are free and you can get packages that include all meals for an extra A$50 (US$40) or so per day. The complex, built around a curving white sand bay, is getting on in years, so expect a well-maintained but modest set of accommodations nestled in tropical gardens or along a hillside. Each unit has views of the sea, garden, or golf course. The 405-hectare (1,000-acre) island is a hilly national park of grasslands, rainforest, and eucalyptuses with 16km (10 miles) of walking trails, including a steep climb to Mt. Jeffreys for fabulous 360-degree views. In addition to a basic but pretty 9-hole golf course (small charge for balls), catamarans, windsurfers, paddle-skis, archery, table tennis, and volleyball are all free for resort guests. The resort rents jet skis, water skis, fishing tackle, and snorkel gear, and a boutique is on site. The swimming pool is lined with welcoming lounge chairs under palms, as is the beach. A packed daily activities program offers everything from parasailing to coconut-throwing competitions. The dive shop makes dive and snorkel day trips, takes first-timers diving in the bay, and runs courses. The island is rimmed with inlets accessible by hiking or rented dinghy. On some days, snorkeling safaris are run to better reefs than those around the island. Rainbow lorikeets are everywhere, even on your shoulder stealing food at fish feeding time. A free kids' club for 5-and-unders operates every day, and during Aussie school vacations a free club runs for 6- to 12-year-olds. Some beachfront units have Jacuzzis, and the front desk lends hair dryers.

Although the dining room lacks sea views, the buffet food is fine; good meals are available at extra cost in Coral's restaurant some nights, and a cafe sells light meals. Every night, the bar has live entertainment, from a staff song-and-dance show to cane toad racing to the Friday-night "Flames of Polynesia" dinner show.

South Molle Island (7km/4 miles east of Shute Harbour), Whitsunday Islands; P.M.B. 21, Mackay, QLD 4741. ✆ **1800/075 080** in Australia, or 07/4946 9433. Fax 07/4946 9580. www.southmolleisland.com.au. info@southmolleisland.com.au. 200 units (some with shower only, some with Jacuzzi). A$240–A$366 (US$192–US$293) double. Extra adult A$39 (US$31), extra child 3–14 A$33 (US$26). A$348 (US$278) family unit (sleeps 4). Ask about full-board packages that include all meals. AE, DC, MC, V. Fantasea Cruises (✆ **1800/650 851** in Australia, or 07/4946 5111) provides launch transfers from Shute Harbour and Hamilton Island. **Amenities**: Restaurant; bar; outdoor pool and children's pool; 2 day/night tennis courts; gymnasium; Jacuzzi; sauna; salon; coin-op laundry. *In room:* A/C, TV.

## CAMPING ON THE ISLANDS

Despite the fact that camping facilities are almost nonexistent, camping on uninhabited islands in the Whitsundays is delightful. There are no showers, and few spots have toilets or even shelters, so be prepared to really rough it. Campfires are not permitted on the islands, so you will need a gas stove. **Island Camping Connection** (✆ **07/4946 5255**) arranges camping on several deserted islands. The company provides transfers to any island for A$45 (US$36) per person (two-person minimum) round-trip (price includes water containers). They also rent camping kits with tent, bedroll, gas stove, mess kit, cutlery, cooler, and flashlight for A$40 (US$32) for two people for the first day, A$20 (US$16) every day thereafter. You need to bring other necessities

such as toilet paper, linen, insect repellent, and washing-up gear. They also rent snorkel gear for A$10 (US$8) per person for 3 days and A$5 (US$4) per day after that, and inflatable double sea kayaks—ideal for getting around once you are on your island—for A$55 (US$44) per night. You bring your own food, a sense of adventure, and a **permit** from the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service. Permits are A$4 (US$3.20) per person, per night for anyone over 5 years old or A$16 (US$13) for a family; you can pick them up from the **QPWS office** on Shute Harbour Road (at Mandalay Rd.), in Airlie Beach (✆ **07/4946 7022**). The office is open Monday through Friday from 8am to 5pm, and most but not all Saturdays from 9am to 1pm. You must organize your boat transport before you go for your permit—consider a sea kayak! Although there are loads of sites, book ahead to secure a spot during school vacations.

## 6 The Capricorn Coast & the Southern Reef Islands

South of the Whitsundays, the Bruce Highway travels through rural country until it hits the beaches of the Sunshine Coast north of Brisbane. It may not be the tourism heartland of the state, but there's plenty to discover. The most spectacular Great Barrier Reef island, **Heron Island,** is off the coast from Gladstone. Heron's reefs offer much to tantalize beneath the ocean's surface, its waters boasting 21 great dive sites. In summer, giant turtles nest on its beaches and in winter humpback whales cruise by.

North of Gladstone is **Rockhampton** and the pretty Capricorn Coast, named after the Tropic of Capricorn that runs through it. Rockhampton is also a steppingstone to **Great Keppel Island,** a resort island popular with happy-go-lucky travelers and young Aussies on holiday. To the south, off the town of Bundaberg, lies another tiny coral cay, **Lady Elliot Island,** which is a nesting site for tens of thousands of sea birds and has a first-rate fringing reef. Two little-known attractions in Bundaberg are its good shore scuba diving and a loggerhead turtle rookery that operates in summer on the beach. Farther south is the world's largest sand island: the World Heritage–listed **Fraser Island,** which can be negotiated only on foot or by 4WD.

### ROCKHAMPTON: THE BEEF CAPITAL

1,055km (633 miles) S of Cairns; 638km (383 miles) N of Brisbane

You may hear Queenslanders talk dryly about "Rockvegas." Don't be fooled. "Rocky" is the unofficial capital of the sprawling beef-cattle country inland and the gateway to Great Keppel Island, which boasts some of the few inexpensive island retreats in Queensland, but bears no resemblance to Las Vegas. Heritage buildings line the Fitzroy River, where barramundi await keen fishermen. Every Friday night at the **Great Western Hotel,** bull-riding cowboys take to the rodeo ring to test their skills against local Brahman bulls.

#### ESSENTIALS

**GETTING THERE** **By Car** Rockhampton is on the Bruce Highway, a 3½-hour drive south of Mackay, and about 90 minutes north of Gladstone.

**By Plane** **QantasLink** (✆ **13 13 13** in Australia, or 800/227-4500 in the U.S. and Canada; www.qantas.com.au) has flights from Brisbane, Mackay, and Gladstone. **Virgin Blue** (✆ **13 67 89** in Australia, or 07/3295 2296) flies direct from Brisbane. **Jetstar** (✆ **13 15 38** in Australia, or 03/8341 4901) flies from Sydney.

**By Train** **Queensland Rail** (✆ **13 22 32** in Queensland, or 07/3235 1122; www.qr.com.au) trains stop at Rockhampton daily. The trip from Brisbane takes just 7 hours on the high-speed Tilt Train; the fare is A$98 (US$78) in economy class and A$147 (US$118) in business class.

**By Bus** **Greyhound Australia** (✆ **13 14 99** in Australia, or 07/4690 9950) serves Rockhampton on its many daily runs between Brisbane and Cairns. The fare is A$91 (US$73) from Brisbane (trip time: 12 hr.) and A$140 (US$112) from Cairns (trip time: 18 hr.).

**VISITOR INFORMATION** Drop by the **Capricorn Tourism** information center, at the city's southern entrance on Gladstone Road at the Capricorn Spire (✆ **1800/676 701** in Australia, or 07/4927 2055; www.capricorntourism.com.au). It's open daily from 9am to 5pm.

**GETTING AROUND** **Avis** (✆ 07/4927 3344), **Budget** (✆ 07/4922 8064), **Hertz** (✆ 07/4922 2721 airport, or 07/4927 8700 city), and **Thrifty** (✆ 07/4927 8755) have offices in Rockhampton. The local bus is **Sunbus** (✆ 07/4936 2133).

## WHERE TO STAY

**Southside Holiday Village** Set in landscaped grounds near the tourist bureau, this well-run park of villas, cabins, and campgrounds is a pleasant place to stay. The kids will like the playground and the water slide in the pool; you will like the spick-and-span villas with separate bedrooms, bunk beds, tiny but neat bathrooms with fresh towels, and latticed patios. Ask for a villa away from the main road. There are public phones at reception (open 24 hr.), and the shop is open 6am to 11pm for basic supplies. For campers, there's a shared kitchen and barbecues. Three times a day, Monday through Saturday, the park runs a courtesy coach into town and the Botanic Gardens.

Lower Dawson Rd. (south side of town), Rockhampton, QLD 4700. ✆ **1800/075 911** in Australia, or 07/4927 3013. Fax 07/4927 7750. www.sshv.com.au. 20 tent sites; 37 powered campsites, 6 with bathroom (shower only); 26 cabins and villas, 20 with bathroom (shower only). A$17–A$18 (US$14) tent site double, extra person A$4–A$6 (US$3.20–US$4.80); A$21–A$32 (US$17–US$26) powered campsite double; A$36–A$40 (US$29–US$32) caravan double, extra person A$6 (US$4.80); A$47–A$60 (US$38–US$48) cabins double; A$62–A$70 (US$50–US$56) villas double, extra person A$6–A$11 (US$4.80–US$8.80). MC, V. **Amenities:** Heated outdoor pool with children's water slide; half-size tennis court; playground; tour desk. *In room* (villas only): A/C, TV, kitchenette, hair dryer, iron.

## WHERE TO DINE

**Restaurant 98** TRADITIONAL AUSTRALIAN This traditional-style restaurant, part of a nice motel complex, offers two distinct dining experiences: alfresco on the terrace or in the air-conditioned comfort of the original house. Both have panoramic views of the Fitzroy River and Mount Archer. The menu features local produce in such dishes as prawns flambé and chicken roulade, along with fresh local seafood. Licensed.

98 Victoria Parade. ✆ **07/4927 5322.** Main courses A$23–A$38 (US$18–US$30). AE, MC, V. Mon–Fri noon–late; Sat–Sun 6pm–late; Mon–Sat 7am–noon; Sun 9am–noon.

## EXPLORING THE AREA: CAVERNS, ABORIGINAL CULTURE & MORE

The **Capricorn Caves** ★ (✆ **07/4934 2883;** wwwcapricorncaves.com.au), 23km (14 miles) north of Rockhampton at Olsen's Caves Road, off the Bruce Highway, have been a popular attraction in this part of the world ever since Norwegian pioneer John Olsen stumbled upon them in 1882. The limestone caves originated in an ancient coral reef (380 million years old) and today are a maze of small tunnels and larger

chambers. The 1-hour tour, which winds through large caverns with stalactite and stalagmite formations before entering the 20m-high (66-ft.) Cathedral Cave, is A$16 (US$13) for adults, A$8 (US$6.40) for children 5 to 15. It departs daily (except Dec 25) on the hour from 9am to 4pm (closing time is 5pm). Spelunkers over age 16 can squeeze through tunnels and chimneys and rock climb on a 3-hour adventure tour that costs A$60 (US$48); book 24 hours ahead for this. From December 1 to January 10, you can catch the Summer Solstice Light tour departing every morning at 11am. On the longest days of the year, the sun moves slowly over the Tropic of Capricorn, and a ray of pure light pours through a hole in the limestone caves. The phenomenon takes place at the only time of year when the sun is directly over the Tropic of Capricorn. The caves are also home to thousands of small insectivorous bats, which leave the cave at sunset to feed. Plan enough time here to walk the 30-minute dry rainforest trail, watch the video on bats in the interpretive center, and feed the wild kangaroos. If you like it so much you want to stay, a motor-home park and campground are attached. Bus tours operate from Rockhampton; contact the Caves for details.

Another great place to go "batty" is at **Mt. Etna Caves National Park,** not far from Olsen's Capricorn Caves. Tens of thousands of female little bent-wing bats pour from a small shaft atop a limestone cavern to feed in the evening. After gorging on insects, they return to **Bat Cleft** limestone caves, one of only five maternity sites for little bent-wing

bats in the world. Guided evening tours are run in summer (Dec–Feb) by the Rockhampton's Department of Environment. Book tours through the **Department of Environment** (✆ **07/4936 0511**) or **Capricorn Tourism** (✆ **07/4927 2055;** www.capricorntourism.com.au).

The **Dreamtime Cultural Centre** (✆ **07/4936 1655;** www.dreamtimecentre.com.au), on the Bruce Highway opposite the Yeppoon turnoff, 6km (3¾ miles) north of town, showcases Aboriginal culture. There's a sandstone cave replica, a display on the dugong culture of the Torres Strait Islanders, and an Aboriginal crafts shop. The center is open Monday to Friday from 10am to 3:30pm. Admission, including a tour, is A$13 (US$10) for adults, A$9 (US$7.20) for seniors, A$11 (US$8.80) for students and backpackers, and A$6 (US$4.80) for kids. Regular tours of burial sites and rock art, with didgeridoo demonstrations and boomerang-throwing classes, start at 10:30am.

Rockhampton has two free public botanic gardens, both nice for a stroll and a barbecue picnic. The **Kershaw Gardens,** which display Aussie rainforest, wetland, and fragrant plants from north of the 30th parallel, also have a monorail and a pioneer-style slab hut where Devonshire teas are served. Enter off Charles Street. The **Rockhampton Botanic Gardens** (✆ **07/4922 1654**), established in 1869, are quite lovely. Admission is free to the small zoo inside the grounds, which features 'roos, koalas, lorikeets, cassowaries, and a range of other creatures, including—rather bizarrely—two chimpanzees. The gardens are open daily 6am to 6pm, the zoo daily from 8am to 5pm. Enter off Ann Street or Spencer Street.

## GREAT KEPPEL ISLAND

15km (9 miles) E off Rockhampton

This 1,454-hectare (3,591-acre) island is home to one major resort and a couple of smaller ones. You can stay at one of the resorts or take a day trip from the mainland and pay to use many of the facilities including watersports equipment, pools, and food outlets. Seventeen beaches on the island are accessible by walking trails or dinghy (which you can rent). The shallow waters and fringing reef make the island a good choice for beginner scuba divers; experienced divers will see corals, sea snakes, turtles, and rays. If you stay overnight, you will most likely be rewarded with one of the spectacular sunsets for which the island is famous.

**GETTING THERE** **Keppel Tourist Services** (✆ **07/4933 6744**) and **Freedom Fast Cats** (✆ **07/4933 6244**) operate launches that make the 30-minute crossing from Rosslyn Bay Harbour, about 55km (34 miles) east of Rockhampton, three or four times daily. The round-trip costs about A$31 (US$25) for adults, A$16 (US$13) for children 5 to 15, and A$78 (US$62) for families of four.

From Rockhampton, take the Capricorn Coast scenic drive Route 10 to Emu Park and follow the signs to Rosslyn Bay Harbour. If you're coming to Rockhampton from the north, the scenic drive turnoff is just north of the city, and from there it's 46km (29 miles) to the harbor. You can leave your car in covered storage at **Great Keppel Island Security Car Park,** 422 Scenic Hwy., near the harbor (✆ **07/4933 6670**), for A$6.50 to A$8 (US$5.20–US$6.40) per day.

**Rothery's Coaches** (✆ **07/4922 4320**) runs from Kern Arcade on Bolsover Street in Rockhampton to Rosslyn Bay Harbour, and back, three times a day. You can request pickup from the airport, train station, or your hotel. Round-trip fares from town are A$17 (US$14) for adults; A$14 (US$11) for seniors, students, and children; and A$42 (US$34) for families of four. The round-trip airport fare is A$30 (US$24)

for adults, A$25 (US$20) for seniors and students, A$14 (US$11) for children, and A$75 (US$60) for families.

**VISITOR INFORMATION** The **Great Keppel Island Information Centre,** at the ferry terminal at Rosslyn Bay Harbour (✆ **1800/774 488** in Australia), dispenses information about activities and accommodations.

## WHERE TO STAY

**Keppel Haven** Not far from the ferry drop-off at the beach is this campground-style enclave of humble but pretty cabins and tents. It's a good choice for families. Each cabin has terra cotta–style floors, a bright kitchenette, a small double bedroom, four bunks (for the kids) in the living-dining area, fans, and a little porch. The permanent tents come with twin or double beds, four bunks separated by a canvas partition, and electricity. There are also two houses, each sleeping six, with full facilities. Bunkhouses have two rooms, each with four beds. Catamarans, Windsurfers, fishing tackle, snorkel gear, and dinghies are available on a pay-as-you-go basis. There's a general store selling basic groceries, and three communal kitchens and barbecues. If you're not staying in a cabin, bring your own towels or rent them.

Great Keppel Island, off Rockhampton, QLD 4700. ✆ **1800/35 6744** in Australia, or 07/4933 6744. Fax 07/4933 6429. www.keppelhaven.com.au. 40 permanent tents, none with bathroom; 12 cabins, all with bathroom (shower only). 12 bunkhouses (with 1 bathroom per 2 rooms). Tent A$18 (US$14) per person triple or quad share, A$20 (US$16) per person twin/double, A$28 (US$22) single; cabins A$120 (US$96) twin or double, extra person A$20 (US$16); bunkhouses A$80 (US$64) double/twin; houses A$220 (US$176) (sleep 6). Linens in tents A$5 (US$4) per person per stay. Ask about 3-day, 2-night packages with Keppel Tourist Services that include ferry transfers and a half-day snorkeling or boom-netting cruise. MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; watersports rentals. *In room:* Kitchenettes (in cabins).

**Mercure Resort Great Keppel Island** After several years catering almost exclusively to the 18- to 35-year-olds, this popular resort has returned to what it has always done best: family holidays. Great Keppel made its name in Australia in the '70s, and has undergone many incarnations since then. In 2005, it was completely refurbished and some new family-friendly features introduced, such as a kids' club for 5- to 12-year-olds. It offers about 60 water- and land-based activities, and about 40 of them, including catamarans, paddle-skis, and windsurfers, are free. Activities that cost extra include scuba diving, tandem sky diving, parasailing, guided snorkeling safaris, jet-skiing, sunset champagne sails, and reef-fishing trips, to name only a few. There are three types of accommodations: Hillside villas with sea or bush views, garden rooms, and beachfront units—my pick because of their location.

Great Keppel Island, QLD 4700. ✆ **1800/245 658** in Australia, or 07/4939 5044. Fax 07/4939 1775. www.greatkeppelresort.com.au. 181 units. A$142 (US$114) double garden and beachfront rooms; A$195 (US$156) double hillside villas. Ask about packages. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 3 restaurants; 5 bars; 5 outdoor freshwater pools; 9-hole golf course; 3 lit tennis courts; gym; 2 Jacuzzis; kids' club (A$10–A$20/US$8–US$16 per 2- or 4-hour session); extensive watersports equipment and rental; game room; concierge; tour desk; salon; massage; coin-op laundry; laundry service; dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

### Super-Cheap Sleeps

**Great Keppel Island Holiday Village & YHA** This self-contained village of cabins and permanent safari tents is just a few minutes walk from the beach and is a perfect place to chill out. There are dorms for women and mixed groups, as well as two full-scale houses to rent, great for groups or families. Cabins have a double bed, single bed, and fold-out sofa bed, as well as a bathroom with shower, small fridge, toaster, kettle, and table and chairs. Free snorkeling gear is provided, and there are guided

kayak and motorized canoe trips to neighboring islands and beaches. A boat will pick you up and drop you off, and all linen and kitchen equipment is provided. A small shop at reception provides basics like milk and bread.

Great Keppel Island, QLD 4700. ✆ **1800/180 235** in Australia, or 07/4939 8655 (7:30am–5:30pm). www.gkiholiday village.com.au. 19 units, 4 with bathroom. A$29 (US$23) per person dorm rooms (sleep 6); A$52 (US$42) double/twin room; A$74 (US$59) double/twin tent; A$120 (US$96) cabin with bathroom; A$170 (US$136) house (sleeps 6). Extra person A$20 (US$16). MC, V. **Amenities**: Tour desk; coin-op laundry; communal kitchen. *In room:* TV, kitchen (in houses), fridge.

## GLADSTONE: GATEWAY TO HERON ISLAND

550km (330 miles) N of Brisbane; 1,162 (697 miles) S of Cairns

The industrial port town of Gladstone is the departure point for beautiful Heron Island. About 25km (16 miles) south of the town are the beach towns of **Boyne Island** and **Tannum Sands,** worth a detour.

### ESSENTIALS

**GETTING THERE & GETTING AROUND** **By Car** Gladstone is on the coast 21km (13 miles) off the Bruce Highway.

**By Plane** **QantasLink** (✆ **13 13 13** in Australia, or 800/227-4500 in the U.S. and Canada; www.qantas.com.au) has many flights a day from Brisbane (trip time: 75 min.) and two direct flights a day from Rockhampton and Bundaberg.

**By Train** **Queensland Rail** (✆ **13 22 32** in Queensland, or 07/3235 1122; www.qr.com.au) operates trains to Gladstone from Brisbane and Cairns most days. The fare from Brisbane (trip time: 6 hr. on the high-speed Tilt Train) is A$88 (US$70); fares from Cairns (trip time: 20 hr.) range from A$151 (US$121) for a seat to A$298 (US$238) per person for a first-class sleeper on the *Sunlander.*

**By Bus** **Greyhound Australia** (✆ **13 14 99** in Australia, or 07/4690 9950) operates daily coaches to Gladstone on the Brisbane-Cairns run. The fare is A$83 (US$66) from Brisbane (trip time: 10 hr.), A$155 (US$124) from Cairns (trip time: 20 hr.).

**Avis** (✆ 07/4978 2633), **Budget** (✆ 07/4972 8488), **Hertz** (✆ 07/4978 6899), and **Thrifty** (✆ 07/4972 5999) have offices in Gladstone.

**VISITOR INFORMATION** The **Gladstone Information Centre** is in the ferry terminal at Gladstone Marina, Bryan Jordan Dr., Gladstone, QLD 4680 (✆ **07/4972 9000;** www.gladstoneregion.org.au). It's open Monday through Friday from 8:30am to 5pm, and Saturday and Sunday from 9am to 5pm.

### WHERE TO STAY

**Country Plaza International** This four-level hotel in the center of town runs a free shuttle to the wharf for guests bound for Heron Island. Gladstone's largest and best hotel, it caters primarily to business travelers, so it has ample facilities—spacious rooms with balconies, modern bathrooms, an upscale seafood restaurant, and a pool and sun deck. Most rooms have views over the port or the city. There are six three-bedroom apartments and one two-bedroom apartment.

100 Goondoon St., Gladstone, QLD 4680. ✆ **07/4972 4499.** Fax 07/4972 4921. www.plazahotels.com.au/gladstone.htm. 80 units. A$115–A$125 (US$92–US$100) double; A$140–A$150 (US$112–US$120) apt. Rates include transfers from airport, coach terminal, marina, and train station. AE, DC, MC, V. Free covered parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor pool; business center; 24-hr. room service; laundry service; dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV w/free movies, fax, dataport, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

## HERON ISLAND: JEWEL OF THE REEF ★

72km (43 miles) NE of Gladstone

The difference between Heron and other islands is that once there, you have no need to travel farther to the reef. Step off the beach, and you enter magnificent fields of coral that seem to stretch for miles. The myriad life forms that abound are accessible to everyone through diving, snorkeling, reef walks at low tide, or aboard a semi-submersible vessel which allows you to view the ocean floor without getting wet. When geologist Joseph Bette Jukes named this piece of paradise in 1843, he overlooked the turtles for which it is now famous and commemorated the reef herons that abounded on the island. There has been a resort here since 1932, and in 1943, the island was made a national park. It is a haven for wildlife and people, and an experience of a lifetime is guaranteed at almost any time of year. The island is a rookery for giant green and loggerhead turtles. Resort guests gather on the beach from late November to February to watch the turtles lay eggs and from February to mid-April to see the hatched babies scuttle down to the water. Humpback whales pass through from June to September.

Three days on Heron gives plenty of time to see everything. The island is so small you can walk around it at a leisurely pace in about half an hour. One of the first things to do is to take advantage of the organized activities that occur several times a day and are designed so guests can plan their own days. Snorkeling and reef walking are major occupations for visitors—if they're not scuba diving, that is, for the island is home to 21 of the world's most stunning dive sites.

Guided island walks are another way to explore the island. Walks include a visit to the research station based on the island. As for the reef walk, just borrow a pair of sandshoes, a balance pole, and a viewing bucket and head off with a guide at low tide. The walk can take up to 90 minutes, but there's no compulsion to stay; if it gets too hot you can head back for the sanctuary of your room or the shady bar area.

A fishing trip should also be on the agenda, even for non-anglers. The reef fish seem to jump onto the hook, and the resort chef is happy to cook it for you for dinner!

**GETTING THERE** A courtesy coach meets flights from Brisbane (with connections from other cities) at Gladstone airport at 10:30am to take guests to Gladstone Marina for the launch transfer to the island (trip time: 1 hr., 40 min.); it departs 11am daily (except Dec 25). Round-trip transfers aboard the sleek new 130-seater catamaran *Heron Spirit* cost A$186 (US$149) for adults, half-price for kids 3 to 14. Helicopter transfers can be arranged for A$291 (US$233) per person one-way.

### WHERE TO STAY & DINE: WORTH A SPLURGE

**Heron Island Resort** ★★★★ Kids This lovely, low-key resort has been transformed over the past few years, and changes to the accommodations mix and cosmetics continue. The latest additions are the chic Wistari suites, each with a private garden and veranda. But new accommodations, a revamped central complex, and a stylish, contemporary new look have not changed the focus on the outdoors. The brilliant colors of the island's surrounding water and reef are reflected in the interiors, and everything is light-filled and breezy. Heron's central complex is equal parts grand Queenslander home and sophisticated beach house, with smart bar and lounge areas open to ocean views and sunsets. Duplex-style Turtle rooms are designed for couples or families, with a casual living area and a shady veranda, or you can go for greater luxury in the suites or the private beach house.

### Heron Island: Worth a Splurge

Heron Island's only resort isn't cheap, but it is included here because it is, quite simply, one of the world's special places and too good to miss. You can't make a day trip to Heron Island, so if you want to visit, you have to stay overnight. Meals are included in the tariff, and a number of activities, so factor that into your decision on whether to visit.

The property has a lounge with a TV, public phones (only the four Point suites and the Beach House have private phones), and Internet access. The Aqua Soul Spa opened in late 2003, offering double treatment rooms, therapies designed for two, and the usual spa treatments and pampering. The spa complex is in a secluded spot on the edge of the island's *pisonia* forests, removed from the main resort.

Heron Island, off Gladstone, QLD 4680 (Voyages, G.P.O. Box 3589, Sydney, NSW 2001). ✆ **1300/134 044** in Australia, or 02/8296 8010 (Sydney reservations office); fax 02/9299 2477 (Sydney reservations office). www.voyages.com.au 109 units (some with shower only). A$500 (US$400) Turtle room double; A$570 (US$456) Reef suite; A$720 (US$576) Heron Beachside suite; A$960 (US$768) Point suite, Wistari suite, or Beach House double. Extra adult A$160 (US$128), extra child 3–14 A$100 (US$80). Free crib. Rates include all meals and many activities. Ask about special packages. AE, DC, MC, V. No children allowed in Point suites or Beach House. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor pool; 2 lit tennis courts; spa; Jacuzzi; limited watersports equipment rental; Heron Kids Junior Rangers program (ages 7–12) during Australian school vacations; game room; activities desk; babysitting; coin-op laundry. *In room:* Fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

## BUNDABERG: GATEWAY TO LADY ELLIOT ISLAND

384km (230 miles) N of Brisbane; 1,439km (863 miles) S of Cairns

The small sugar town of Bundaberg is the closest to the southernmost point of the Great Barrier Reef. If you visit the area between November and March, allow an evening to visit the Mon Repos turtle rookery. Scuba divers may want to take in some of Australia's best shore diving right off Bundaberg's beaches.

**GETTING THERE & GETTING AROUND** **By Car** Bundaberg is on the Isis Highway, about 50km (31 miles) off the Bruce Highway from Gin Gin in the north and 53km (33 miles) off the Bruce Highway from just north of Childers in the south.

**By Plane** **QantasLink** (✆ **13 13 13** in Australia, or 800/227-4500 in the U.S. and Canada; www.qantas.com.au) flies from Brisbane daily and from Gladstone three times a week.

**By Train** **Queensland Rail** (✆ **13 22 32** in Queensland, or 07/3235 1122; www.qr.com.au) trains stop in Bundaberg every day en route between Brisbane and Cairns. The fare is A$63 (US$50) from Brisbane in economy class on the Tilt Train; fares range from A$163 (US$130) for a seat to A$316 (US$253) for a first-class berth on the *Sunlander* from Cairns. The trip takes 4½ hours from Brisbane and 8¼ hours from Cairns on the Tilt Train; the *Sunlander* takes 6¾ hours from Brisbane and 25 hours from Cairns.

**By Bus** **Greyhound Australia** (✆ **13 14 99** in Australia, or 07/4690 9950) stops here many times a day on runs between Brisbane and Cairns. The 6½ hour trip from Brisbane costs A$64 (US$51). From Cairns it is a 22-hour trip, and the fare is A$172 (US$138).

**Avis** (✆ 07/4152 1877), **Budget** (✆ 07/4151 1355), **Hertz** (✆ 07/4151 2099), and **Thrifty** (✆ 07/4151 6222) all have offices in Bundaberg.

## Moments Up Close & Personal with a Turtle

The egg in my hand is warm, soft, about the size of a Ping-Pong ball. At our feet, a giant green turtle sighs deeply as she lays a clutch of about 120 eggs in a pear-shaped chamber dug from the sand. A tear rolls from her eye. In the distance the wedgetail shearwaters call to each other over the sound of the waves.

Our guide has retrieved the turtle egg from the egg chamber, and we pass it around in silence. It is just one of the amazing experiences a few days on Heron Island can bring. The egg-laying ritual is central to a trip to Heron Island in the summer, when they make their annual visit to the sandy shores of the atoll. At night and in the early morning, small groups of people gather on the beaches to witness the turtles lumber up the beach, dig a hole, and lay their eggs.

Every night during the season, volunteer guides from the University of Queensland research station based on the island are on hand to give an added dimension to the experience. You can watch and ask questions as the researchers tag and measure the turtles before they return to the water.

Or get up early in the morning and head to the beach. In a few minutes, I had found turtle tracks and followed them up the beach to find a nesting female. Nearby, another two turtles had attracted small clusters of spectators. The turtles are not easily disturbed and you can get very close.

The laying season is from December to February, with the hatchlings scrambling down the beach from January to May. Only one in 5,000 hatchlings will live to return in about 50 years to lay their own eggs.

Another good place to watch the turtles nesting is Mon Repos Beach, outside Bundaberg. **Mon Repos Conservation Park** is one of the two largest loggerhead-turtle rookeries in the South Pacific. The visitor center by the beach has a great display on the turtle life cycle and shows films at approximately 7:30pm daily in summer. Last year, the park introduced a new booking system for turtle-watching tours, to help cope with the crowds. Access to the beach is by ticket only, and you must book your visit to Mon Repos during the turtle season. Tickets are sold through the **Coral Coast Visitor Information Centre,** 20 Bauer St., Bargara (✆ **07/4153 8888**). Tours start at 7pm, and you will be given a time for your tour—it's a better system, which saves waiting around in a long queue of people. Nesting happens around high tide; hatching usually occurs between 8pm and midnight. Take a flashlight if you can, and a sweater, as it can get quite cool.

The **Mon Repos Turtle Rookery** ★ (✆ **07/4159 1652** for the visitor center) is 14km (8¾ miles) east of Bundaberg's town center. Follow Bourbong Street out of town toward Burnett Heads as it becomes Bundaberg-Bargara Road. Take the Port Road to the left and look for the Mon Repos signs to the right. Admission to the visitor center is free from April through November (Mon–Fri 9am–4pm), but when the turtles start nesting, you pay A$5.50 (US$4.40) for adults, A$3 (US$2.40) for children ages 5 to 15. From November through March, the center is open daily from 7pm until midnight.

**VISITOR INFORMATION** There are two **Bundaberg Region Visitor Centres,** at 271 Bourbong St. (at Mulgrave St.) and 186 Bourbong St. (✆ **1800/308 888** in Australia, or 07/4153 8888; www.bundabergregion.info). They are open daily from 9am to 5pm.

## WHERE TO STAY

**Sun City Motel** *Value* This basic but neat and tidy motel is a short stroll across the river from the town center. The rooms are clean and well-kept, and have a ceiling fan, toaster, and tea- and coffee-making facilities. Three family rooms have a double bed and twin bunks. Home-cooked meals can be delivered to your room, or you can use the guest barbecue and outdoor dining area. Hosts Sue and Steve will pick you up from the bus, train, or airport.

11A Hinkler Avenue, North Bundaberg, QLD 4670. ✆ **1800/308 888** in Australia, or 07/4152 1099. Fax 07/4153 1510. www.suncitymotel.com.au. 12 units (all with shower only). A$60–A$65 (US$48–US$52) double. Extra adult A$12 (US$9.60), extra child under 8 A$8 (US$6.40). AE, DC, MC, V. Free covered parking. **Amenities:** Outdoor salt-water pool; nearby golf course; access to nearby health club; tour desk; limited room service; coin-op laundry; same-day dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

## WHAT TO SEE & DO

The best shore diving in Queensland is in Bundaberg's **Woongarra Marine Park.** It has soft and hard corals, urchins, rays, sea snakes, and 60 fish species, plus a World War II Beaufort bomber wreck. There are several scuba operators. **Salty's Dive Centre** (✆ **1800/625 476** in Australia, or 07/4151 6244; www.saltys.net) rents dive gear for A$45 (US$36). It also runs day trips for A$100 (US$80), including all equipment. Five-day open-water and 4-day shore courses are A$580 (US$464) and A$169 (US$135), respectively. A 3-day, 3-night southern Great Barrier Reef dive cruise costs A$495 (US$396), plus A$65 (US$52) for all equipment rental. Night dives are free, but you pay A$10 (US$8) for chemical sticks and light.

# LADY ELLIOT ISLAND

80km (48 miles) NE of Bundaberg

The southernmost Great Barrier Reef island, Lady Elliot is a 42-hectare (105-acre) coral cay ringed by a wide shallow lagoon filled with dazzling coral life.

Reef walking, snorkeling, and scuba diving are why people come to this coral cay that's so small you can walk across it in 15 minutes. You may snorkel and reef-walk during the 2 to 3 hours before and after high tide, so plan your schedule accordingly. You will see dazzling corals and brilliantly colored fish, clams, sponges, urchins, and anemones. Divers will see a range of marine life, including green and loggerhead turtles (which nest on the beach Nov–Mar). Whales pass by from June to September.

Lady Elliot is a sparse, grassy island rookery, not a lush tropical paradise, so don't expect white sand and palm trees. Some people will find it too spartan; others will relish chilling out in a beautiful, peaceful location with reef all around. Just be prepared for the smell and constant noise of those birds.

**GETTING THERE** You reach the island by a 30-minute flight from Bundaberg or Hervey Bay. Book your air travel with your accommodations. Round-trip fares are A$175 (US$140) for adults and A$88 (US$70) for children 3 to 12. There is a 10-kilogram (22-lb.) luggage limit. **Seair Pacific** (✆ **07/5599 4509;** www.seairpacific.com.au) operates day tours from Brisbane and the Gold Coast for A$599 (US$479) or from the Sunshine Coast for A$449 (US$359); prices include flights, snorkel gear, glass-bottom-boat ride, lunch, and guided activities.

### *Moments* The Birds of Lady Elliot

When you land on the grass airstrip at Lady Elliot Island, you'll think you're on the set of Hitchcock's *The Birds.* The air is thick with tens of thousands of swirling noddy terns and bridal terns that nest in every available branch. They leave their mark on every surface, including you (so bring a big cheap hat for protection).

## WHERE TO STAY

**Lady Elliot Island Resort** ★ Accommodations here are basic, but visitors come for the reef, not the room. Because of the relatively low number of guests, you pretty much get the reef to yourself. Top of the range are Island suites, which have one or two separate bedrooms, and sea views from the deck. Most Reef rooms have a double bed and two bunks, and a deck with views through the trees to the sea. Shearwater rooms have bunk beds and sleep up to six. All room types have modern private bathrooms. The cool, spacious tent cabins have four bunks, electric lighting, and timber floors, but share the toilets and showers used by day guests. The limited facilities include a boutique, a dive shop, and an education center. The resort has no air-conditioning, no keys (secure storage is at the front desk), no TVs, no radio, and one public telephone. The food is basic. A low-key program of mostly free activities includes glass-bottom boat rides, badminton, guided walks, and beach volleyball.

Great Barrier Reef, off Bundaberg. (P.O. Box 206, Torquay, QLD 4655). ✆ **1800/072 200** in Australia, or 07/5536 3644. Fax 07/5536 7285. www.ladyelliot.com.au. 40 units, 20 with bathroom (shower only). A$290 (US$232) tent cabin double; A$330 (US$264) Shearwater room double; A$390 (US$312) Reef double; A$450 (US$360) 1-bedroom Island suite; A$480 (US$384) 2-bedroom Island Suite; A$820 (US$656) 2-bedroom Island Suite for 4. Extra child 3–12 A$75 (US$60). 3-night minimum Dec 24–Jan 5. Ask about 2-, 4-, 5-, and 7-night packages, and dive packages. Rates include breakfast and dinner. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Cafe/bistro; dining room; saltwater pool; children's program (ages 3–12) during Queensland school holidays. *In room:* No phone.

# 7 Fraser Island: Eco-Adventures & 4WD Fun

1,547 (928 miles) S of Cairns; 260km (156 miles) N of Brisbane; 15km (9 miles) E of Hervey Bay

The biggest sand island in the world, this 164,000-hectare (405,000-acre) World Heritage–listed island off the central Queensland coast attracts a mix of sensitive ecotourists and Aussie fishermen. Fraser is almost untouched, with eucalyptus woodlands, soaring dunes, clear creeks, ancient rainforest, blue lakes, ocher-colored sand cliffs, and a stunning 121km-long (75-mile) beach. For 4WD fans though, Fraser's beauty lies in its complete absence of paved roads. On weekends when the fish are running, it's nothing to see 100 4WDs lining **75-Mile Beach,** which is a gazetted (public) road. Pedestrians should beware!

## ESSENTIALS

**GETTING THERE** **By Car** Hervey (pronounced *Har*-vey) Bay is the main gateway to the island. Take the Bruce Highway to Maryborough, then the 34km (21-mile) road to Hervey Bay. If approaching from the north, turn off the highway at Torbanlea, north of Maryborough, and cut across to Hervey Bay. Allow 3 hours from the Sunshine Coast, a good 5 hours from Brisbane.

Guests at Kingfisher Bay Resort (p. 342) can get to the resort aboard the **Kingfisher Bay Fastcat,** which departs Urangan Boat Harbour at Hervey Bay at 8:45am, noon, 4, 6:30 (7 Fri–Sat), and 10pm. Round-trip fare for the 40-minute crossing is A$44 (US$35) adults and A$22 (US$18) kids 4 to 14. The resort runs a shuttle from Hervey Bay's airport and coach terminal to the harbor. You can park free at the Fastcat terminal. Drive to the terminal first to unload your luggage at the Kingfisher Bay reception desk, then return to the parking lot and walk back (only 100m/328 ft.). **Fraser Coast Secure Vehicle Storage,** 629 The Esplanade (✆ **07/4125 2783**), a 5-minute walk from the terminal, has covered parking for less than A$10 (US$8) per 24 hours.

**By Plane** **Virgin Blue** (✆ **13 67 89** in Australia, or 07/3295 2296) flies direct from Sydney to Hervey Bay four times a week, with connections from Adelaide and Melbourne.

**By Bus** **Greyhound Australia** (✆ **13 14 99** in Australia, or 07/4690 9950) coaches stop in Hervey Bay on the Brisbane-Cairns-Brisbane routes. The 5-hour trip from Brisbane costs A$48 (US$38). From Cairns, the fare is A$183 (US$146) and the trip is almost 24 hours.

**By Train** The nearest station is in **Maryborough West,** 34km (20 miles) from Hervey Bay. Passengers on the high-speed **Tilt Train** (Sun–Fri) can book connecting bus service to Pialba (a suburb of Hervey Bay) through **Queensland Rail** (✆ **13 22 32** in Queensland, or 07/3235 1122; www.qr.com.au). The fare from Brisbane for the 3½-hour Tilt Train trip is A$64 (US$51) in economy class, including the bus fare. Fares are A$175 (US$140) in a seat and A$334 (US$267) in a first-class sleeper from Cairns (trip time: just under 27 hr.). Train passengers from the north must take a courtesy shuttle from Maryborough West to Maryborough Central, then take the next available local bus to Pialba.

**GETTING THERE & GETTING AROUND BY 4WD** Four-wheel-drive is the only permissible mode of vehicle transport on the island. Many 4WD rental outfits are based in Hervey Bay. You must be 21 or over to rent a 4WD. You'll pay about A$110 to A$230 (US$88–US$184) a day, plus around A$20 to A$35 (US$16–US$28) per day to reduce the deductible (usually A$4,000/US$3,200), plus a deposit (typically A$500/US$400), that is refundable (assuming the vehicle is not damaged). You must also buy a government Vehicle Access Permit, which costs A$33 (US$26) from your

### Tips Organized Tours & Package Deals on Fraser Island

If staying at the Kingfisher Bay Resort is beyond your budget, consider a **day trip** or booking a package. Kingfisher Bay Resort offers a range of packages. Its 3-day, 2-night package (✆ **1800/072 555** in Australia, or 7/4120 3333; www.cooldingotour.com), includes Fastcat transfers from Hervey Bay, tours of the island, and twin- or quad-share accommodations in the Wilderness Lodge . The package, including most meals, is A$312 (US$250) quad share or A$364 (US$291) twin share per person plus National Park fees of A$18 (US$14). A 2-day/1-night package is A$237 (US$190) quad share or A$278 (US$222) twin share plus National Park fees of A$12 (US$9.60). Eurong Beach Resort (✆ **07/4127 9122;** www.eurong.com) offers day trips from Hervey Bay with touring and lunch starting from A$109 (US$87) adults and A$60 (US$48) children.

### Tips Walking Fraser Island

The stunning Fraser Island World Heritage Area is the location for one of Queensland's six Great Walks (p. 323). The **Fraser Island Great Walk** (✆ **07/5459 6114;** www.epa.qld.gov.au) follows a continuous winding track from Dilli Village to Lake Garawongera. The main trail is 85km (53 miles) long and takes 6 to 8 days to complete, but offshoots provide short, full-day, overnight, and 2- to 3-day walks. The walk takes you to many of the island's popular landmarks, such as Lake McKenzie, Central Station, Wangoolba Creek, Valley of the Giants, and Lake Wabby.

rental-car company, Urangan Boat Harbour, or the River Heads boat ramp; or A$40 (US$32) from a Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service office on the island.

Both **Bay 4WD Centre** (✆ **1800/687 178** in Australia, or 07/4128 2981; www.bay4wd.com.au) and **Ausbay 4WD Rentals** (✆ **1800/679 479** in Australia, or 07/4124 6177) rent four-wheel-drives; offer four-wheel-drive packages that include camping or accommodations; rent camping gear; organize Vehicle Access Permits, barge bookings, camping permits, and secure storage for your car; and pick you up from the airport, the coach terminal, or your hotel. **Kingfisher Bay 4WD Hire** (✆ **1800/249 330** in Australia, or 07/4120 3366; www.kingfisher-bay-4wdhire.com.au), at Kingfisher Bay Resort (see below), rents four-wheel-drives for A$230 (US$184) a day, plus a A$33 (US$26) Fraser Island driving permit and a A$2,000 (US$1,600) security deposit (by credit card) held until return of the vehicle in the original condition. The company allows half-day and 1-day rentals. Rates are cheaper if you book for a week. Book well in advance.

Four-wheel-drives reach the island on the **Fraser Venture** barge (✆ **07/4125 4444**), which runs three times a day (four times on Sat) from River Heads, 17km (11 miles) south of Urangan Boat Harbour. Kingfisher Bay Resort (see below) also runs a barge from River Heads. The round-trip fare for a vehicle with up to four occupants is A$115 (US$92), plus A$5.50 (US$4.40) per extra passenger. It is a good idea to book a place in advance for the 45-minute crossing.

The **Rainbow Venture** and **Fraser Explorer** barges (✆ **07/5486 3154**) provide access to Rainbow Beach and operate continuously between Inskip Point and Hook Point between 6am and 5:30pm daily. The cost is A$65 (US$52) return for a vehicle and four passengers.

**Fraser Island Taxi Service** (✆ **07/4127 9188**) is another option for getting around. There is only one taxi on the island (a 4WD, of course), so it's important to book ahead. They will pick you up anywhere on the island and will give you a quote on price before you set off. The taxi seats five, and there's also room for your luggage and fishing rods.

**VISITOR INFORMATION** Contact the **Hervey Bay Tourism Bureau,** Urraween Road (at Maryborough–Hervey Bay Rd.), Pialba (P.O. Box 8, Hervey Bay, QLD 4655; ✆ **1800/811 728** in Australia, or 07/4125 9855; www.herveybaytourism.com.au). A better online source is www.hervey.com.au. The **Marina Kiosk** (✆ **07/4128 9800**) at Urangan Boat Harbour is a one-stop booking and information agency for all Fraser-related travel. Several Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service information offices are on the island.

There are no towns and very few facilities, food stores, or services on the island, so if you're camping, take all supplies with you.

## WHERE TO STAY

**Fraser Island Retreat** ★ *Finds* This is the wild side of Fraser Island, just minutes from 75-Mile Beach. Don't come expecting a luxury resort—this one has comfortable timber cottages and all the amenities you need. There's a small pool, surrounded by a deck and deck chairs, and each cottage has a small veranda. The rooms all have fans, limited cooking facilities, and a VCR. (You can rent videos.) The bar-bistro is open for all meals, but be warned that day-tour buses stop here for lunch, so it can be crowded at that time. If you want to cook for yourself, there's a general store selling food and liquor. The store also has fuel, ice, and gas for campers. You can also hire a four-wheel-drive from the resort. There's a public phone. The only access is by plane (**Air Fraser Island; ✆ 1800/247 992** in Australia, or 07/4125 3600) or bus. **Fraser Island Tours** (**✆ 07/4125 3933**) will transfer guests to the resort from Hervey Bay; it also runs day tours of the island for A$137 (US$110) adults and A$94 (US$75) children under 14.

Happy Valley, Fraser Island, QLD 4650. **✆ 07/4127 9144.** Fax 07/4127 9131. www.fraserislandco.com.au. 9 units (all with shower only). A$125–A$160 (US$100–US$128) 1-bedroom lodge for up to 3; A$160–A$200 (US$128–US$160) family lodge for up to 5. Ask about packages. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor pool; tour desk; car-rental desk; babysitting; coin-op laundry. *In room:* TV/VCR, kitchenette, fridge, no phone.

## WORTH A SPLURGE

**Kingfisher Bay Resort** ★★ *Kids* This sleek, environmentally friendly ecoresort lies low along Fraser's west coast. Hotel rooms are smart and contemporary, with air-conditioning and a Japanese-style screen opening onto a balcony looking into the bush, but my pick is the two- and three-bedroom villas just a short walk from the main resort area and pools. The hillside villas, which have Jacuzzis on their balconies, are fairly luxurious, but guests must contend with that long haul up the hill. Each villa has a kitchen, washing machine, and dryer. An impressive lineup of ecoeducational activities includes daily four-wheel-drive tours with a ranger to points of interest around the island, free guided walks daily, and an excellent free Junior Eco-Ranger

### *Tips* 4WD Fundamentals

Driving a 4WD is great fun and not hard for a beginner, but if you've never driven one, get a good briefing from your rental company before you head out. Fraser's loose sand tracks can be tricky, and getting bogged is common. The beach can be dangerous for the novice—if you travel too high up, you can get trapped in soft sand; if you travel too low, a wave can bog your vehicle in soft sand under the water (and rust your car). Car-rental companies don't like that, and they can smell salt on an axle a mile away! Stick to the firmest tracks, know the tides, and ask for advice. You'll have to drive a lot slower on a 4WD trail than you would on a conventional road; take that into account when you plan your day. For example, it takes a full day to get to Indian Head and back, and then only when the tide is favorable. Look out for light planes landing on the beach (which is a runway as well as a road).

### Please Don't Feed the Dingoes

The dingoes that roam the island are emboldened by visitors who have—sometimes deliberately, sometimes unwittingly—fed them over the years. These dangerous wild animals have been responsible for one death and several serious attacks in recent years. Do not feed them, and keep your distance. Feeding or interacting with dingoes on Fraser Island can incur fines of up to A$3,000 (US$2,400). ***Note:*** The rangers strictly enforce the laws.

program on weekends and during school vacations. You can also join bird-watching tours, guided canoe trips, sunset champagne sails, and dolphin and dugong spotting cruises. Wildlife videos play continuously in the lobby, and the on-site ranger office lists the animals and plants you are most likely to spot.

Fraser Island (P.M.B. 1, Urangan, QLD 4655). ✆ **1800/072 555** in Australia, or 07/4120 3333. Fax 07/4120 3326. www.kingfisherbay.com. 262 units. A$270 (US$216) hotel double; A$816–A$1,080 (US$653–US$864) 3 nights in 2-bedroom villa for up to 5; A$969–A$1,260 (US$775–US$1,008) 3 nights in 3-bedroom villa for up to 6. 3-night minimum in villas. Extra person A$22 (US$18). Free crib. Ask about packages. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 3 restaurants; 4 bars; 4 outdoor saltwater pools (1 w/water slide); lit tennis courts; Jacuzzi; watersports equipment rental and fishing tackle rental; kids' club; game room; tour desk; babysitting. *In room:* A/C, TV, kitchen (in villas), fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron, laundry (in villas).

## CAMPING

Fraser has seven camping areas, most with showers and toilets, or you can camp on the beach. Camping permits, which you can buy at the various **Queensland Parks & Wildlife Service** offices on the island (✆ **07/4127 9191**), are A$4 (US$3.20) per person or A$16 (US$13) per family per night.

## ECO-EXPLORING THE ISLAND

Fraser's gemlike turquoise lakes and tea-colored "perched" lakes in the dunes are among the island's biggest attractions. The brilliant blue **Lake McKenzie** is absolutely beautiful; a swim here may be the highlight of your visit. **Lake Birrabeen** is another popular swimming spot. Don't miss a refreshing swim in the fast-flowing clear shallows of **Eli Creek.** Wade up the creek for a mile or two and let the current carry you back down. You should also take the boardwalk through a verdant forest of palms and ferns along the banks of **Wanggoolba Creek.**

Don't swim at **75-Mile Beach,** which hugs the eastern edge of the island—there are dangerously strong currents and a healthy shark population to contend with. Instead, swim in the **Champagne Pools** (also called the Aquarium)—pockets of soft sand protected from the worst of the waves by rocks. The bubbling seawater turns the pools into miniature spas. The pools are just north of **Indian Head,** a 60m (197-ft.) rocky outcrop at the northern end of the beach.

View the island's famous colored sand in its natural setting—the 70m (230-ft.) cliffs called the **Cathedrals,** which stretch for kilometers north of the settlement of Happy Valley on the eastern side of the Island.

Some of Queensland's best fishing is on Fraser Island. Anglers can throw a line in the surf gutters off the beach (freshwater fishing is not allowed). Bream, whiting, flathead, and swallowtail are the beach catches. Indian Head is good for rock species and tailor, and the waters east off Waddy Point yield northern and southern reef fish.

Kingfisher Bay Resort (see "Where to Stay: Worth a Splurge," above) offers free fish clinics, rents tackle, and organizes half-day fishing jaunts.

From August through October, tour boats crowd the straits to see humpback whales returning to Antarctica with calves in tow. Kingfisher Bay Resort runs a **whale-watching cruise** from Urangan Boat Harbour.

## 8 The Sunshine Coast

Warm sunshine, beaches upon beaches, trendy restaurants, and a relaxed lifestyle attract Aussies to the Sunshine Coast in droves. Despite some unsightly commercial development in recent years, the Sunshine Coast is still a great spot if you like lazing on sandy beaches and enjoying a good meal.

The Sunshine Coast starts at **Caloundra,** 83km (50 miles) north of Brisbane and runs all the way to **Rainbow Beach,** 40km (24 miles) north of **Noosa Heads,** where the fashionable crowd goes. There are plenty of inexpensive motels and holiday apartments to rent. Noosa's restaurants are great, and while none are super-expensive, few are cheap—so be prepared to spend a little if you want to eat out.

Most of the Noosa's sunbathing, dining, shopping, and socializing takes place on trendy Hastings Street, Noosa Heads, and the adjacent Main Beach. The commercial strip of Noosa Junction is a 1-minute drive; a 3-minute drive west along the river takes you to low-key **Noosaville,** where Australian families rent holiday apartments. Giving Noosa a run for its money is the newly spruced up **Mooloolaba,** about 30km (18 miles) south, which has a better beach and about 90 great restaurants.

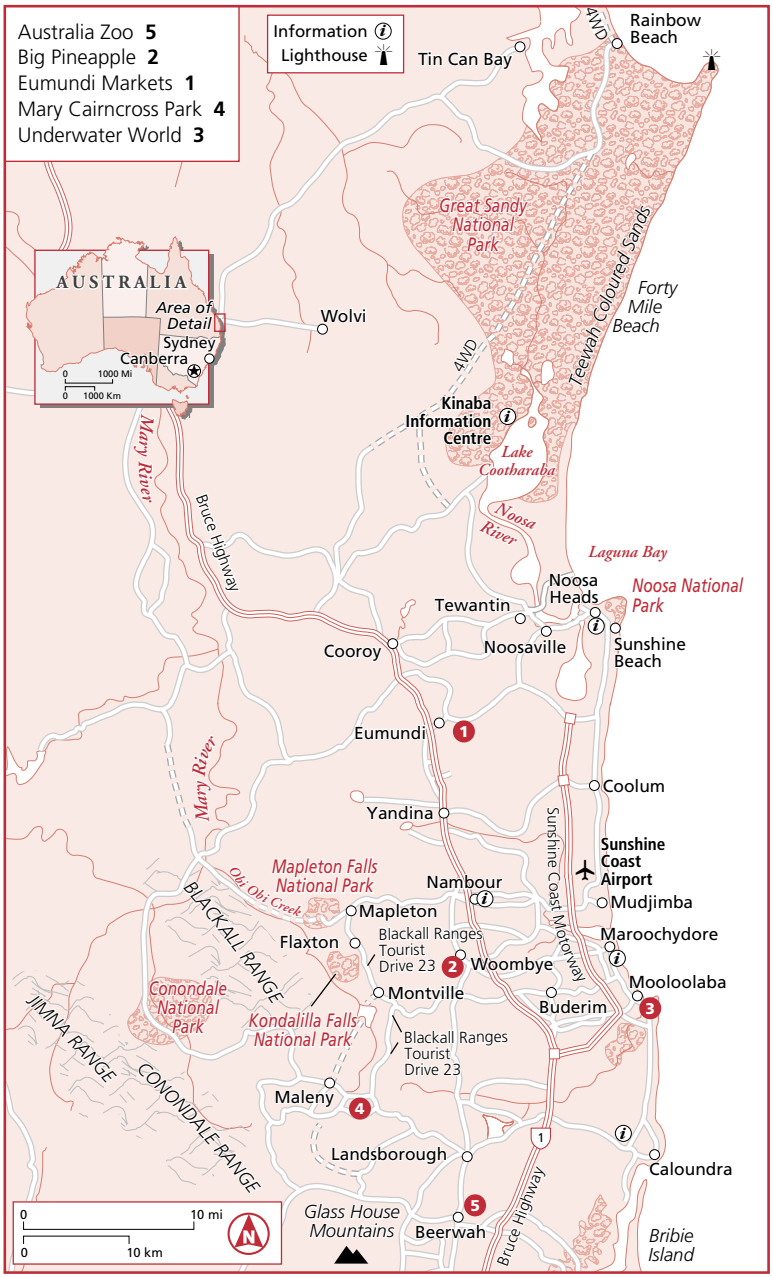
A short drive away, in the hinterland, mountain towns like Maleny, Montville, and Mapleton lead the way to the stunning beauty of the Glass House Mountains, a dramatic series of 13 volcanic plugs.

### SUNSHINE COAST ESSENTIALS

**GETTING THERE** **By Car** If you're driving from Brisbane, take the Bruce Highway north to Aussie World theme park at Palmview, then exit onto the Sunshine Motorway to Mooloolaba, Maroochydore, or Noosa Heads. The trip takes about 2 hours.

**By Plane** **Virgin Blue** (✆ **13 67 89** in Australia, or 07/3295 2296) and **Jetstar** (✆ **13 15 38** in Australia, or 03/8341 4901) fly direct from Melbourne and Sydney. **Henry's Airport Bus Service** (✆ **07/5474 0199;** www.henrys.com.au) meets all flights; door-to-door transfers to Noosa Heads are A$18 (US$14) for adults, A$10 (US$8) for kids 4 to 14, or A$42 (US$34) for families of four, one-way. Bookings are essential and should be made 24 hours ahead if possible.

**By Train** The nearest **train** station to Noosa Heads is in **Cooroy,** 25km (16 miles) away. **Queensland Rail** (✆ **13 22 32** in Queensland, or 07/3235 1122; www.qr.com.au) serves Cooroy once daily from Brisbane on its **CityTrain** (✆ **07/3235 5555**) network. The trip takes about 2½ hours, and the fare is A$16 (US$13). Other trains will take you there via Nambour or Caboolture, but you will still have to then get a bus connection to get to Noosa Heads. Queensland Rail's long-distance trains from Brisbane pick up but do not drop off passengers in Cooroy, with the exception of the high-speed **Tilt Train** (which runs Sun–Fri). The fare is A$28 (US$22). The *Sunlander* makes several trips from Cairns each week; the fare is A$183 (US$146) for a seat, A$345 (US$276) for a first-class sleeper. Local bus company **Sunbus** (✆ **13 12 30** or 07/5450 7888) meets most trains at Cooroy station and travels to Noosa Heads; take bus no. 12.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Big Pineapple 2
Eumundi Markets 1
Mary Cairncross Park 4
Underwater World 3
Information
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Lake Cootharaba
Mary River
Bruce Highway
Noosa River
Laguna Bay
Noosa Heads
Noosa National Park
Tewantin
Noosaville
Sunshine Beach
Cooroy
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Mary River
Coolum
Yandina
Sunshine Coast Motorway
Sunshine Coast Airport
Mapleton Falls National Park
 Obi Obi Creek
Nambour
Mapleton
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BLACKALL RANGE
Flaxton
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Woombye
Maroochydore
Mooloolaba
Montville
Buderim
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Maleny
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Landsborough
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Glass House Mountains
5
Beerwah
Bruce Highway
Bribie Island

**By Bus** Several **coach** companies have service to Noosa Heads from Brisbane, including **Suncoast Pacific** (✆ **07/5443 1011** on the Sunshine Coast, or 07/3236 1901 in Brisbane). **Greyhound Australia** (✆ **13 14 99** in Australia, or 07/4690 9950) has many daily services from all major towns along the Bruce Highway between Brisbane and Cairns. Trip time to Noosa Heads is 2 hours 35 minutes from Brisbane, and just over 27 hours from Cairns. The fare is A$25 (US$20) from Brisbane and A$196 (US$157) from Cairns.

**VISITOR INFORMATION** Contact **Tourism Sunshine Coast Ltd,** P.O. Box 264, Mooloolaba, QLD 4557 (✆ 07/5477 7311; fax 07/5477 7322; www.sunshinecoast.org). In Noosa, drop into the **Noosa Information Centre,** at the eastern roundabout on Hastings Street where it intersects Noosa Drive (✆ 07/5447 4988; fax 07/5474 9494). It's open daily from 9am to 5pm. Other information centers are: **Maroochy Tourism,** Sunshine Coast Airport (✆ 07/5448 9088) and Sixth Avenue and Melrose Parade, **Maroochydore,** (✆ 07/5479 1566); and **Caloundra Visitor Information Centre,** 7 Caloundra Rd., Caloundra (✆ 07/5491 9233).

**GETTING AROUND** Major car-rental companies on the Sunshine Coast are **Avis** (✆ 07/5443 5055 Sunshine Coast Airport. or 07/5447 4933 Noosa Heads), **Budget** (✆ 07/5448 7455 airport, or 07/5474 2820 Noosa Heads), **Hertz** (✆ 07/5448 9731 airport, or 07/5447 2253 Noosa Heads), and **Thrifty** (✆ 07/5451 8426 airport, or 07/5447 2299 Noosa Heads). Many local companies rent cars and four-wheel-drives, including **Trusty** (✆ 07/5491 2444).

The local bus company is **Sunbus** (✆ **13 12 30** in Australia, or 07/5450 7888).

## WHERE TO STAY

### Halse Lodge ★ *Finds*

It's a backpackers' hostel, but don't let that put you off staying here. The gracious National Trust–listed Queenslander house is set in .8 hectares (2 acres) of rainforest on a hill overlooking the town and the sea, and just 100m (329 ft.) from Noosa's Main Beach. The lodge will give you free use of surfboards and boogie boards. It's almost as cozy and welcoming as a B&B, and it's kept extra-clean by on-the-ball managers. Breakfasts are priced from A$3.50 to A$7 (US$2.80–US$5.60). Dinner in the bistro is an equally good deal, with main courses from A$8 to A$11 (US$6.40–US$8.80). Smoking is not permitted in rooms, but there are areas on the veranda where you can indulge. There's Internet access, and a friendly little bar, with great music, where guests gather before heading off to the local night clubs.

2 Halse Lane, off Noosa Dr. at Noosa Parade, Noosa Heads, QLD 4567. ✆ **1800/242 567** in Australia, or 07/5447 3377. www.halselodge.com.au. 35 units, all with shared bathroom. 8 double rooms, 5 twin rooms, 1 room with twin bunk beds, 1 twin/triple room, 6 share dorms (sleep 6 each), and 14 share dorms (sleep 4 each). A$65 (US$52) twin double for YHA/Hostelling International members, A$75 (US$60) twin/double for non-members; A$87–A$96 (US$70–US$77) triple share; A$26 (US$21) dorms. MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; coin-op laundry; nonsmoking rooms.

### *Tips* When to Get the Best Sunshine Coast Rates

Room rates on the Sunshine Coast are mostly moderate, but they spike in the Christmas period from December 26 to January 26, during school holidays, and the week after Easter. Book well ahead at these times. Weekends are often busy, too.

**Jacaranda Apartments** These units are not as fancy as the swank apartment blocks up on the hill, but if you don't mind views of the river instead of the ocean, this neat block set back off the road in the thick of the Hastings Street action will do fine. Most of the one-bedroom apartments, which sleep four to five people, face the Noosa River; a few look onto the parking lot and the small pool. The decor is fine—stone-like tile floors, painted brick walls, and lime-washed furniture—although the kitchens are a little old. The studios sleep three but are a bit small and dark, and lack views. They have only a fridge and kettle, not a kitchen. Bring your own hair dryer. The beach is just down the alleyway across the road.

12 Hastings St. ✆ **07/5447 4011** (Holiday Noosa booking center). Fax 07/5447 3410. www.holidaynoosa.com.au. 28 units (with shower only). High season A$160 (US$128) studio, A$150 (US$120) suite; low season A$105 (US$84) studio, A$245 (US$196) suite. MC, V. Free covered parking. **Amenities:** Outdoor pool; coin-op laundry. *In room:* A/C, TV, kitchen (in suites), fridge, coffeemaker.

**Noosa Village Motel** *Value* All the letters from satisfied guests pinned up on the wall here are a testament to owners John and Mary Skelton's hard work in continually sprucing up this bright little motel in the heart of Hastings Street. The pleasant rooms are spacious and freshly painted, with a cheerful atmosphere, and all rooms have ceiling fans. And at these rates, it's one of Hastings Street's best values.

10 Hastings St., Noosa Heads, QLD 4567. ✆ **07/5447 5800.** Fax 07/5474 9282. noosavillage@bigpond.com.au. 11 units (all with shower only). High season (Dec 24–Jan 14) A$195 (US$156) double, A$260 (US$208) family suite; low season A$115–A$125 (US$92–US$100) double, A$165 (US$132) family suite. Extra person A$10–A$15 (US$8–US$12). Ask about May–June specials. MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Bike rental; tour desk; car-rental desk; room service (breakfast only); babysitting; coin-op laundry; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* TV, kitchenette, fridge, hair dryer.

### IN THE HINTERLAND

**Avocado Grove Bed & Breakfast** Joy and Brian Baxter's modern, red-cedar Queenslander home is in a peaceful rural setting in the middle of an avocado grove just off the ridge-top road. The cozy, comfortable rooms have country-style furniture, full-length windows opening onto private verandas, and oil heaters for cool mountain nights. The big suite downstairs has a TV and kitchen facilities. Colorful parrots and other birds are a common sight. Guests are welcome to picnic on the peaceful sloping lawns, which have wonderful views west to Obi Obi Gorge in the Connondale Ranges.

10 Carramar Ct., Flaxton via Montville, QLD 4560. ✆/fax **07/5445 7585.** www.avocadogrove.com.au. 4 units, 3 with bathroom (shower only), 1 with private adjacent bathroom. A$130 (US$104) double; A$150 (US$120) suite. Rates include full breakfast. Ask about weekend and midweek packages. MC, V. Turn right off ridge-top road onto Ensbey Rd.; Carramar Ct. is the 1st left. **Amenities:** Tour desk; in-room massage; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* Coffeemaker, hair dryer.

## WHERE TO DINE

Noosa's Hastings Street comes alive at night with vacationers wining and dining at restaurants as sophisticated as those in Sydney and Melbourne. For a great breakfast try **Café Le Monde** at the southern end of Hastings Street (opposite the back of the Surf Club), or **Bistro C,** one of the few restaurants that still has beachfront dining. **Noosa Junction** is a better, if less attractive, bet for cheap eats, and there are about 90 restaurants at **Mooloolaba** to choose from. Noosa National Park has barbecues and tables at the entrance and many quiet spots with great ocean views.

**Noosa Yacht and Rowing Club** *Value* AUSTRALIAN Value-for-money food and a great location on the Noosa River make this a popular venue for locals and visitors.

Sit out on the deck and enjoy the cruising boats or a stunning sunset. It's basic roasts, seafood, and steak, and there are daily specials. It can get crowded, so get there early.

Chaplin Park, Gympie Terrace, Noosaville. ✆ **07/5449 8602.** Reservations not required. Main courses under A$15 (US$12). No credit cards. Daily noon–2:30pm and 5:30–9pm; Sun 8am–10:30am.

**Season** ✭ MODERN AUSTRALIAN With one of the few beachfront restaurant locations, this is one of Noosa's most popular restaurants. Former Sydney chef Gary Skelton has maintained his following, with vacationers from southern states rediscovering Season, and even if the locals balk at the A$10 (US$8) corkage fee for BYO wine, there's no question the food remains superb. Breakfast dishes can be as simple as muffins, or you can indulge yourself with buttermilk-and-banana pancakes (with palm sugar butter and maple syrup). For dinner? How about the pan-fried reef fish filet with broad beans, mash and sauce *antiboise* or, even simpler, crisp fried fish and chips with *tartare* sauce and fresh lemon? Smoking is not permitted.

25 Hastings St., Noosa Heads, QLD 4567. ✆ **07/5447 3747.** Reservations essential for dinner; accepted same day only. Main courses A$17–A$31 (US$14–US$25); breakfast items A$4–A$12 (US$3.20–US$9.60). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 8am–10pm.

**Wok In Noosa** ASIAN NOODLES Locals flock to this clean, cheery joint for tasty meals that are usually under about A$15 (US$12). Most get their food to go, but some eat in the colorful dining room, where you help yourself to cutlery, a bottle opener, and wine glasses. Don't overlook the big range of *laksas* (soups), a tummy-filler that comes in a bowl the size of a baby's bathtub. They deliver—minimum order is A$15 (US$12), plus A$3 (US$2.40) delivery charge. Kids' meals are A$5.50 (US$4.40) and come with a free Popsicle. BYO.

77 Noosa Dr. (at the roundabout at Sunshine Beach Rd.), Noosa Junction. ✆ **07/5448 0372.** Main courses A$8–A$13 (US$6.40–US$10). MC, V. Daily noon–9pm.

### WORTH A SPLURGE

**Ricky Ricardo's** ✭ MODERN AUSTRALIAN Owners Leonie Palmer and Steven "Stef" Fisher, stalwarts of the Noosa restaurant scene, named their latest not for a Latin TV idol but for Stef's great-uncle Ricky, a "gentleman scallywag" whose zest for life this place reflects. I'd choose it for lunch over dinner simply because of the fantastic setting; the food is sensational at any time. You can sit over a long meal drinking in the view across the Noosa River while nibbling from an innovative tapas menu or something more substantial. The menu is Mediterranean style, with fresh seafood and regional produce used throughout, and changes seasonally.

2/2 Quamby Place (inside the shopping center), Noosa Sound, QLD 4567. ✆ **07/5447 2455.** Reservations recommended. Main courses A$17–A$35 (US$14–US$28). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily noon–midnight.

## EXPLORING THE AREA

**HITTING THE BEACH & OTHER OUTDOOR FUN** Main Beach, Noosa Heads, is the place to swim, surf, and sunbathe. If the bikini-clad supermodel lookalikes are too much, head to Sunshine Beach, just behind Noosa Junction off the David Low Way, about 2km (1¼ miles) from Noosa Heads. It's just as beautiful. Both beaches are patrolled by lifeguards 365 days a year.

Learn to surf with two-time Australian and World Pro-Am champion **Merrick Davis** (✆ **0418/787 577** mobile; www.learntosurf.com.au), who's lived here for about 10 years. Merrick and his team run 2-hour lessons on Main Beach daily for A$45 (US$36), 3-day certificate courses for A$125 (US$100), and 5-day courses for

A$170 (US$136). They will pick you up and drop you off at your accommodations. They also rent surfboards, body boards, and sea kayaks.

If you want to rent a windsurfer, canoe, kayak, surf ski, catamaran, jet ski, or canopied fishing boat that you can play with on the Noosa River, or take upriver into **Great Sandy National Park** (see below), check out the dozens of outfits along Gympie Terrace between James Street and Robert Street in Noosaville.

The **Aussie Sea Kayak Company** (✆ **07/5477 5335;** www.ausseakayak.com.au), at The Wharf, Mooloolaba, runs a 2-hour sunset paddle on the Maroochy River every day for A$45 (US$36)—including a glass of champagne on your return as a reward for all the hard work! Half-day tours run every day for 3 to 4 hours at Mooloolaba (A$65/US$52), day tours for 6 hours on Tuesday, Friday, and Saturday at Noosa (A$135/US$108). The company also runs overnight adventures to Moreton and North Stradbroke Islands, and to Fraser Island and the Whitsundays for up to 6 days.

**EXPLORING NOOSA NATIONAL PARK** A 10-minute stroll from Hastings Street brings you to the 437-hectare (1,080-acre) Noosa National Park. Anywhere you see a crowd looking up, you're sure to spot a koala. They're often seen in the unlikely venue of the parking lot at the park entrance. A network of well-posted walking trails leads through the bush. The most scenic is the 2.7km (1.5-mile) coastal trail. The shortest is the 1km (.5-mile) Palm Grove circuit; the longest is the 4.7km (3-mile) Tanglewood trail inland to Hell's Gates, definitely worth the effort.

**NORTH OF NOOSA: GREAT SANDY NATIONAL PARK** Stretching north of Noosa along the coast is the 57,000-hectare (140,000-acre) Great Sandy National Park (often called Cooloola National Park), home to forests, beaches, and freshwater lakes, including the state's largest, Lake Cootharaba. A popular thing to do is cruise the silent Everglades, formed by the Noosa River and tributary creeks. The park's information office, the **Kinaba Information Centre** (✆ **07/5449 7364;** daily 9am–3pm), is on the western shore of Lake Cootharaba, about 30km (18 miles) from Noosaville. It has a display on the area's geography and a mangrove boardwalk; it's accessible only by boat, which you can rent from the numerous outfits in Noosaville. Several operators run half-day cruises into the Everglades, and guided kayak tours explore the park's lower reaches.

The other option is to take a 4WD along 40-Mile Beach, a designated highway with traffic laws, for a close-up view of the Teewah colored sand cliffs. This is a great place to get away from the crowds and enjoy nature's wonders. Lifeguards are not on duty, so do not swim alone, and take care. Tours are available, or you can rent a 4WD and explore on your own. To reach the beach, cross Noosa River on the ferry at Tewantin, then take Maximilian Drive for 4km (2½ miles) to the beach. Stock up on water, food, and gas in Tewantin. The **ferry** (✆ **07/5447 1321**) costs A$10 (US$8) per vehicle round-trip; it operates from 5:30am to 10:15pm Sunday through Thursday, and 5:30am to midnight Friday and Saturday.

**WILDLIFE PARKS & THEME PARKS** Small theme parks seem to thrive on the Sunshine Coast. Don't expect thrill rides, but you might find some of them a pleasant way to spend a few hours.

A transparent tunnel with an 80m (262-ft.) moving walkway that takes you through a tank filled with sharks, stingrays, groupers, eels, and coral is the highlight at **Underwater World** (✆ **07/5444 8488;** www.underwaterworld.com.au), at The Wharf, Mooloolaba. Kids can pick up starfish and sea cucumbers in the touch pool,

### Tips Crikey! It's the Crocodile Hunter!

Crocodile hunter Steve Irwin's amazing **Australia Zoo** ★ (✆ **07/5436 2000;** www.crocodilehunter.com) is on the Glass House Mountains Tourist Drive at Beerwah, off the Bruce Highway. Steve and his wife, Terri, stars of the *Crocodile Hunter* television shows, have spent A$40 million (US$32 million) in recent years turning their zoo into a world-class attraction covering 100 hectares (251 acres). The highlight is the "crocoseum," a 5,000-seat stadium in which the daily croc feedings are held at noon. Other demonstrations and feedings are held regularly throughout the day, and you can also hand-feed 'roos, pat a koala, check out foxes and camels, and watch (even hold!) venomous snakes and pythons. You can also tour the Koala and Wildlife Hospital next door to see how sick and injured animals are cared for. Admission is A$34 (US$27) for adults, A$29 (US$23) for seniors and students, A$24 (US$19) for kids 3 to 14, and A$109 (US$87) for families of five. The park is open daily from 9am to 4:30pm. Closed December 25. Courtesy buses will pick you up and return you to Beerwah railway stations or Noosa, Maroochydore, Alexandra Headlands, Mooloolaba, and Caloundra.

and there are static displays on whales and sharks, shark breeding, freshwater crocodile talks, an otter enclosure, and a 30-minute seal show. You can also swim with the seals (A$100/US$80) or dive with the sharks (A$95/US$76 for certified divers, including gear, or A$145/US$116 for nondivers). It's open daily (except Dec 25) from 9am to 6pm (last admission at 5pm). Admission is A$24 (US$19) for adults, A$17 (US$14) for seniors and students, A$14 (US$11) for children 3 to 15, and A$65 (US$52) for families of five. Allow 2 hours to see everything, more if you want to attend all the talks.

At the **Ginger Factory,** Pioneer Road, Yandina (✆ **1800/067 686** in Australia, or 07/5446 7100), you can watch the works of a ginger-processing plant that supplies most of the world's sugar-cured ginger. You can also shop for ginger plants and a huge range of ginger products, and browse a handful of gift shops. Admission is free. The park is open daily from 9am to 5pm, closed Christmas Day. (The factory is closed some weekends and around Christmas; you should call first, to make sure it's open.)

At the **Big Pineapple** (✆ **07/5442 1333;** www.bigpineapple.com.au), 6km (3¾ miles) south of Nambour on the Nambour Connection Road in Woombye—don't worry, you can't miss the 16m-tall (52-ft.) monument—you can take a train ride through a working pineapple plantation, ride through a rainforest and a macadamia farm in a macadamia nut–shaped carriage, and take a boat ride through a hydroponics greenhouse. The park also has a baby animal farm, kangaroos, koalas, a rainforest walk, a small but excellent nocturnal house called "Creatures of the Night," and a gift shop. It's open daily from 9am to 5pm; it opens later on April 25 (Anzac Day) and December 25 (call for exact times). Admission is free; each tour is priced separately so you can do all or just one, but the best option is to buy a family pass to all tours, which costs A$75 (US$60) for two adults and up to four children 4 to 14. Allow half a day if you do everything.

## A SCENIC MOUNTAINTOP DRIVE THROUGH THE SUNSHINE COAST HINTERLAND

A leisurely drive along the lush ridgetop of the **Blackall Ranges** ★ behind Noosa is a popular half- or full-day excursion. Cute mountain villages full of crafts shops and cafes, and terrific views of the coast are the main attractions. Macadamia nuts, peaches, and other homegrown produce are often for sale by the road at dirt-cheap prices.

On Saturdays, start at the colorful outdoor **Eumundi Markets** ★ in the historical village of Eumundi, 13km (8 miles) west of Noosa along the Eumundi Road. Locals and visitors wander under the huge shady trees among hundreds of stalls selling locally grown organic lemonade, fruit, groovy hats, teddy bears, antique linen, homemade soaps, handcrafted hardwood furniture—everything is handmade or home-grown. Get your face painted, your palm read, or your feet massaged. Listen to some didgeridoo music or bush poetry. When shopping's done, everyone pops into the trendy cafes on Eumundi's main street. The market runs from 6:30am to 3pm.

From Eumundi, take the Bruce Highway to **Nambour** and turn right onto the Nambour-Mapleton Road. (The turnoff is just before you enter Nambour, so if you hit the town, you've gone too far.) A winding 12km (7¼-mile) climb up the range between rolling farmland and forest brings you to **Mapleton.** Stop at the pub for some spectacular views from the veranda. From here, detour almost 4km (2½ miles) to see the 120m (394-ft.) **Mapleton Falls.** A 200m (656-ft.) bushwalk departs from the picnic grounds and ends with great views over the Obi Obi Valley. There is also a 1.3km (.75-mile) circuit.

Back on the Mapleton-Maleny Road, head south 3.5km (2 miles) through lush forest and farms to **Flaxton Gardens.** Perched on the cliff with breathtaking coast views is a wine cellar offering tastings and sales, pottery shop, cafe, and gift shop. A bit farther south you can detour right and walk the 4.6km (2.75-mile) round-trip trail to the base of the 80m (262-ft.) **Kondalilla Falls.** You can swim here. It's a slippery downhill walk, and the climb back up can be tough.

Take the main road south for 5.5km (3½ miles) to **Montville.** This English-style village has become such a tourist stop that it has lost some of its character, and lots of people decry its touristy facade. But everyone still ends up strolling the tree-lined streets and browsing the gift shops and galleries.

About 13km (8 miles) down the road, is **Maleny,** more modern and less commercialized than Montville. Be sure to follow the signs around to **Mary Cairncross Park** for spectacular views of the **Glass House Mountains,** 11 volcanic plugs protruding out of the plains. The park has a kiosk, a playground, free wood barbecues, and a rainforest information center; a 1.7km (1-mile) walking trail loops through the rainforest past some giant strangler figs.

You can return to Noosa the way you came or, if you're in a hurry, you can drive down to Landsborough and rejoin the Bruce Highway.

## 9 The Gold Coast

Love it or hate it, the Gold Coast is an Australian icon. Bronzed lifesavers, bikini-clad meter maids, tanned tourists draped with gold jewelry, high-rise apartment towers that cast long shadows over parts of the beach . . . but the glitz, the glitter, and the overdevelopment pales into insignificance as soon as you hit the beach. The white sands stretch uninterrupted for 70km (18 miles), making up for the long strips of neon-lit motels and cheap souvenir shops. Since the '50s, Australians have been flocking to this

strip of coastline, and that hasn't changed. Today, they're queuing up with tourists from all around the world to get into the theme parks, but everyone can still find a quiet spot on the beach and the sun shines on.

The Gold Coast's theme parks are not as large or as sophisticated as Disney World, but they're exciting enough. Apart from the three major parks—**Dreamworld, Warner Bros. Movie World,** and **Sea World**—there are of plenty of smaller-scale ones. If theme parks aren't your thing, there are also 40 golf courses, dinner cruises, and loads of adrenaline-based outdoor activities, from bungee jumping to jet-skiing. The best activity on the Gold Coast, though, is the natural kind, and it doesn't cost a cent—hitting the surf and lazing on the beach.

## GOLD COAST ESSENTIALS

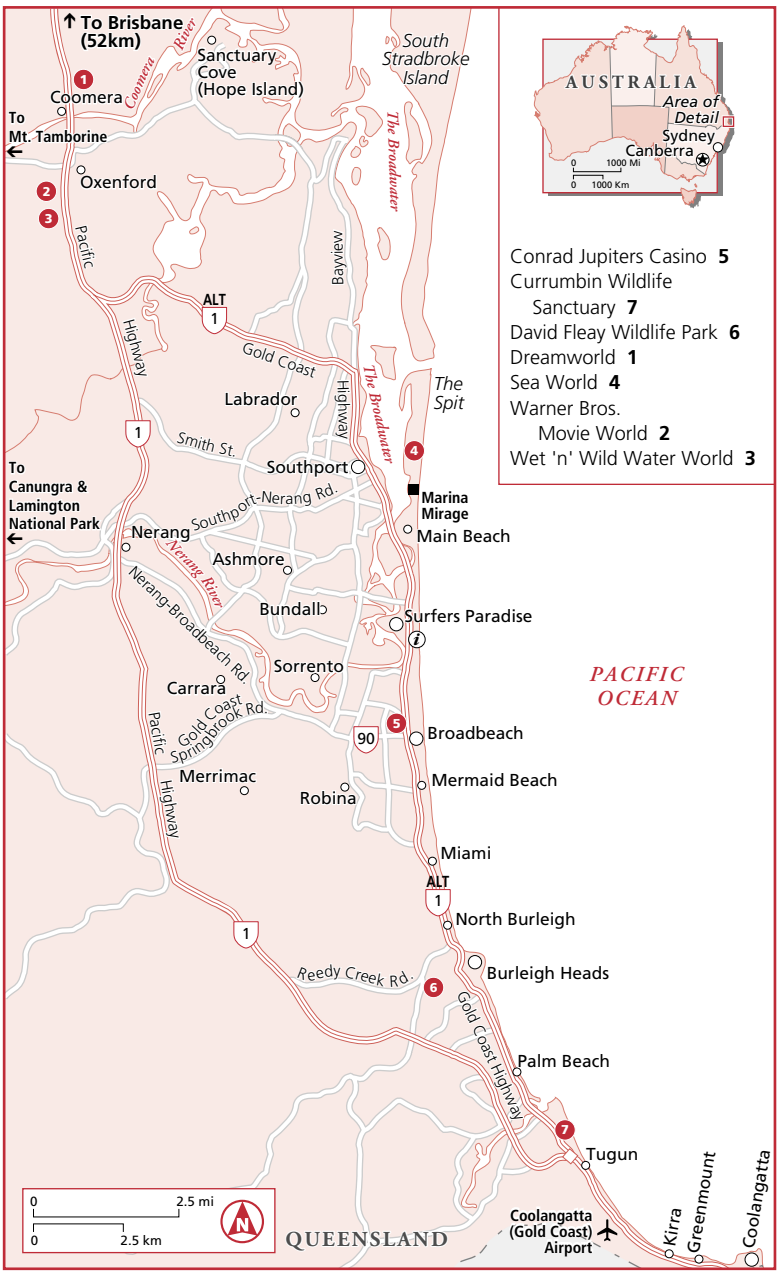
**GETTING THERE** **By Car** Access to the Gold Coast Highway, which runs the length of the Coast, is off the Pacific Highway from Sydney or Brisbane. The drive takes about 80 minutes from Brisbane. From Sydney it's an 11-hour trip, sometimes longer, on the crowded, rundown Pacific Highway.

**By Plane** Domestic **flights** land at Gold Coast Airport, Coolangatta, 25km (16 miles) south of Surfers Paradise. **Qantas** (✆ 13 13 13 in Australia) operates direct flights from Sydney and Adelaide. **QantasLink** flies from Brisbane and Newcastle. **Virgin Blue** (✆ 13 67 89 in Australia, or 07/3295 2296) flies direct from Sydney, Melbourne, Canberra, and Adelaide. **Jetstar** (✆ 13 15 38 in Australia, or 03/8341 4901) flies from Melbourne. Qantas subsidiary **Australian Airlines** (✆ 1300/799 798 in Australia, or book through Qantas, 800/227-4500 in the U.S. and Canada) links the Gold Coast and Cairns. The **Gold Coast Tourist Shuttle** (✆ 13 12 30 in Australia) meets every flight and will transfer you to your accommodations; the fare is A$15 (US$12) one-way and A$26 (US$21) round-trip for adults, A$8 (US$6.40) one-way or A$13 (US$10) round-trip for kids ages 4 to 13, A$38 (US$30) one-way or A$65 (US$52) round-trip for families of four. A **taxi** from the airport to Surfers Paradise is about A$30 (US$24) but may be higher if traffic is heavy.

The nearest international gateway is **Brisbane International Airport** (see chapter 6). The **Coachtrans Airporter** bus meets most flights and makes about 20 trips a day from Brisbane Airport to Gold Coast accommodations for A$35 (US$28) adults, A$18 (US$14) children 4 to 14. The trip takes about 90 minutes to Surfers Paradise. You do not need to book in advance unless you are on an evening flight; if you are, call ✆ **13 12 30** in Queensland, or 07/3238 4700.

**AirtrainConnect** links Brisbane Airport and the Gold Coast by train and bus for A$39 (US$31) adults, A$20 (US$16) children 5 to 14, or A$100 (US$80) for a group of five. Take Airtrain to the Gold Coast, then an air-conditioned coach shuttle to any accommodations between Southport Spit at the northern end of the Gold Coast and Burleigh Heads to the south. Airtrain's SmartPass, for A$99 (US$79) per adult, A$53 (US$42) per child, or A$222 (US$178) for families of four for 3 days, covers AirtrainConnect transfers, as well as unlimited door-to-door theme park transfers on the Gold Coast Tourist Shuttle and use of the local Surfside bus network, 24 hours a day. Passes are also available for 5 and 7 days.

**By Bus** **Coachtrans** (✆ **13 12 30** in Queensland, or 07/3238 4700) runs between Brisbane and Gold Coast hotels. The one-way fare is A$35 (US$28) adults, A$18 (US$14) for kids, or A$89 (US$71) for families.


↑ To Brisbane (52km)
Coomera River
Sanctuary Cove (Hope Island)
South Stradbroke Island
1
Coomera
To Mt. Tamborine
Oxenford
2
3
Pacific Highway
The Broadwater
Bayview
ALT 1
Gold Coast Highway
Labrador
The Spit
1
Smith St.
Southport
4
To Canungra & Lamington National Park
Southport-Nerang Rd.
Marina Mirage
Main Beach
Nerang
Nerang River
Ashmore
Nerang-Broadbeach Rd.
Bundall
Surfers Paradise
Sorrento
Carrara
PACIFIC OCEAN
Gold Coast Springbrook Rd.
5
90
Broadbeach
Pacific Highway
Merrimac
Robina
Mermaid Beach
Miami
ALT 1
North Burleigh
1
Reedy Creek Rd.
6
Burleigh Heads
Gold Coast Highway
Palm Beach
7
Tugun
Coolangatta (Gold Coast) Airport
Kirra
Greenmount
Coolangatta
0 2.5 mi
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N
QUEENSLAND
AUSTRALIA
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Sydney
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Conrad Jupiters Casino 5
Currumbin Wildlife Sanctuary 7
David Fleay Wildlife Park 6
Dreamworld 1
Sea World 4
Warner Bros. Movie World 2
Wet 'n' Wild Water World 3

**Greyhound Australia** (✆ **13 14 99** in Australia, or 07/4690 9950) makes daily stops at Surfers Paradise from Sydney and Brisbane. The trip from Sydney takes 14 to 15 hours, and the fare is A$96 (US$77). Trip time from Brisbane is 90 minutes, and the fare is A$20 (US$16).

**By Train** Suburban trains (**Queensland Rail Citytrain;** ✆ **07/3235 5555**) depart Brisbane Central and Roma Street stations every 30 minutes for the 72-minute trip to the Gold Coast suburb of Robina. The fare is A$10 (US$8) adults, A$5 (US$4) children 5 to 14. Local buses meet the trains to take passengers to Surfers Paradise.

If you come by train to Surfers Paradise from Sydney or other southern cities, service is on **Countrylink** (✆ **13 22 32** in Australia, or 02/8202 2000; www.countrylink.info), and you will need to transfer to a connecting coach in Casino or Murwillumbah, just south of the Queensland border. The trip from Sydney takes 14 to 15 hours and the fare is A$110 (US$88) for a sitting berth, A$230 (US$184) for a sleeper.

**VISITOR INFORMATION** The **Gold Coast Tourism Bureau** (✆ **07/5538 4419;** www.goldcoasttourism.com.au) has an information kiosk on Cavill Avenue in Surfers Paradise. It is stacked with brochures on things to see and do, and the staff will book tours and arrange accommodations. The kiosk is open Monday through Friday from 8:30am to 5:30pm, Saturday and public holidays from 9am to 5:30pm, and Sunday from 9am to 3:30pm. A second information booth is at the corner of Griffith and Warner streets in Coolangatta. It is open weekdays from 8am to 4pm, Saturday from 8am to 3pm, public holidays from 8am to 1pm.

To obtain material in advance, e-mail info@gctb.com.au or write to the bureau at P.O. Box 7091, Gold Coast Mail Centre, QLD 9726.

**ORIENTATION** The heart of the Gold Coast is **Surfers Paradise** (“Surfers” to the locals), a high-rise forest of apartment towers, shops, cheap eateries, taverns, and amusement parlors. The pedestrian-only **Cavill Mall** in the center of town connects the Gold Coast Highway to **The Esplanade,** which runs along the beach.

The **Gold Coast Highway** is the main artery that connects the beachside suburbs lining the coast. Just north of Surfers is **Main Beach**, where Tedder Avenue is lined with shops, restaurants, and cafes. Heading south from Surfers, the main beach centers are **Broadbeach,** where retail complexes and restaurants are mushrooming; family-oriented **Burleigh Heads;** and the twin towns of **Coolangatta** in Queensland and **Tweed Heads** just over the border in New South Wales. Coolangatta still has the small-town feel ideal for families, despite some major development in the past few years. Gold Coast Airport is the other side of the highway from Coolangatta.

West of Surfers Paradise and Broadbeach are the affluent suburbs of Ashmore and Nerang, where luxury residential estates and many of the region’s championship golf courses have sprung up.

### *Value* Look for the Coupons

Discount coupons and deals on tours, cruises, car rental, restaurants, nightclubs, and so on, are advertised in countless free weekly pocket guides available in hotel lobbies and shops everywhere. Grab a handful and make the most of them!

### Tips The Secret of the Seasons

School holidays, especially the Christmas vacation from mid-December to the end of January, are peak season on the Gold Coast. Accommodations are booked months in advance at these times. The rest of the year, occupancy levels plummet and so do rates! Packages and deals abound in the off season, and perfectly adequate motel rooms can go for as little as A$50 (US$40) double on standby.

**GETTING AROUND** You don't really need a car to get around. The hotels listed below are within walking distance of the beach, shops, and restaurants, and many tour companies pick up at hotels. You can reach the theme parks by bus. A car is handy for a day trip to the hinterland and to get around to restaurants and golf courses. Parking is cheap and plentiful in numerous parking lots and on the side streets between the Gold Coast Highway and The Esplanade.

**Avis** (✆ 07/5539 9388), **Budget** (✆ 07/5538 1344), **Hertz** (✆ 07/5538 5366), and **Thrifty** (✆ 07/5570 9999) have outlets in Surfers Paradise and at Gold Coast Airport. Endless local outfits rent cars at cheap rates.

**Surfside Buslines** (✆ **13 12 30** in Australia, or 07/5571 6555) is the local bus company. Its best deal is the Freedom Pass, which allows you to hop on and off the buses anytime you like. The 3-day pass costs A$46 (US$37) adults, A$23 (US$18) children, and A$115 (US$92) for families of four; 5-, 7-, 10-, and 14-day passes are also available. This is a particularly good deal if you're planning to visit the theme parks because the company's Gold Coast Tourist Shuttle operates door-to-door transfers four times every morning from anywhere on the coastal strip. You must make a reservation for this, but if you are staying in Surfers Paradise or Broadbeach you can hop on the Surfside Theme Park Express (included in the Freedom Pass). It leaves every 15 minutes from 8:25 to 11am on weekdays and until 9:45am on weekends, from Pacific Fair shopping center at Broadbeach, picking up at bus stops along the way.

## WHERE TO STAY

### Ashmore Palms Holiday Village ★ Finds

A rare collection of 22 South American macaws is a major attraction at this award-winning budget tourist park. The former caravan park has grown and developed as the Illich family has transformed it into a tropical garden of 6 hectares (15 acres) complete with swimming lagoon and waterfall, heated pool with fountains, barbecues, a general store, and a 1km (½-mile) rainforest walk through thousands of palm trees. All are self-contained with kitchens and bathrooms, and most have a private balcony overlooking the gardens. There's a wide selection of two- and three-bedroom cabins and villas to choose from; the newest and most elegant are the Mediterranean-style two-story Macaw Mansions, which have a parents' retreat with private bathroom (with Jacuzzi) upstairs. Lorikeet Lodges are designed for access for those with disabilities. Ashmore Palms has won the Australian Tourism Award more than once for best budget accommodations, and although it is located in the Gold Coast suburbs, it is still less than a 10-minute drive to Surfers Paradise. It also has the advantage of being less than 15 minutes from the theme parks.

71 Hinde St., Ashmore, QLD 4214. ✆ **07/5539 3222.** Fax 07/5597 1576. www.ashmorepalms.com.au. 85 units (most with shower only). A$100–A$125 (US$80–US$100) holiday villa; A$107–A$132 (US$86–US$106) hibiscus chalets; A$124–A$190 (US$99–US$152) family villa; A$136–A$161 (US$109–US$129) palm cottage; A$165–A$190

(US$132–US$152) cactus cabana; A$183–A$208 (US$146–US$166) lorikeet lodge; A$218–A$243 (US$174–US$194) macaw mansions; A$236–A$261 (US$189–US$209) rainforest retreat. Extra adult A$12 (US$9.60), extra child 3–13 A$8 (US$6.40). 4-night minimum stay applies in low season, and 7-night minimum high season. Crib A$2 (US$1.60) per night or A$10 (US$8) per week. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 outdoor swimming pools (1 heated); tennis court; 3 coin-op laundries. *In room:* A/C (coin-op except cabanas, lodges, and mansions), TV, VCR (in deluxe family villas, cabanas, lodges, and mansions), kitchen, hair dryer (except holiday villas), iron.

**Mercure Resort Surfers Paradise** Kids Parents, if your idea of a holiday is to not even see your kids for most of the day, this place is for you. The resort has a licensed child-care center for little ones as young as 6 weeks and up to 5 years old. For 5- to 12-year-olds, there's the Gecko Club, complete with pedal minicars, the Leonardo painting room, and an underwater themed pirate adventure world. You can laze around the pool area and watch the kids play on the water slide. The child-care center charges moderate fees, and the Gecko Club is free; both operate daily year-round. The low-rise building is comfortable, and rooms have views of the pool or the gardens. Family quarters sleep up to five in two rooms, and some (the family studios) have kitchenettes.

The resort rents a wide range of kiddy stuff such as prams (strollers), bottle warmers, car seats, and PlayStations, and it has a minisupermarket and takeout meal service. The big range of activities makes this a great value for families, and the center of Surfers Paradise and the patrolled beach are a few blocks across the highway. Some rooms are near the highway, so ask for a quiet spot.

122 Ferny Ave., Surfers Paradise, QLD 4217. ✆ **800/221-4542** in the U.S. and Canada, 1800/074 111 in Australia, 0181/283 4500 in the U.K., 0800/44 4422 in New Zealand, or 07/5579 4444. Fax 07/5579 4496. www.mercuresurfers.com.au. 405 units. A$210 (US$168) resort room for up to 4; A$250 (US$200) deluxe room for up to 4; A$290 (US$232) resort family room for up to 5. Ask about special packages. AE, DC, MC, V. Free covered secure parking. Bus: 1 or 1A (stop outside the resort). **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; cafe/sandwich bar; bar; 4 outdoor pools; 2 tennis courts; exercise room; Jacuzzi; sauna; child-care center and kids' club; game room/video arcade; concierge; tour desk; shuttle bus; business center; babysitting; coin-op laundry; dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV/VCR w/free and pay-per-view movies, kitchenette (in some), fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron, safe.

## GOOD-VALUE VACATION APARTMENTS

Apartments make good sense for families and for any traveler who wants to self-cater to save money. Because the Gold Coast has a dramatic oversupply of apartments that stand empty except during school vacations, you can get a spacious modern unit with ocean views for the cost of a midrange hotel. Apartment block developers got in quick to snag the best beachfront spots when the Gold Coast boomed in the 1970s, so apartment buildings, not hotels, have the best ocean views. The **Gold Coast Booking Centre** (✆ **1300/737 111** in Australia; www.gcbc.com.au) is a centralized booking service that offers great deals at more than 1,200 apartments in Surfers Paradise and Broadbeach.

**Enderley Gardens** Just a block from the beach and centered on a large lagoon-style pool, this older-style apartment block is a short walk from Cavill Mall. Units are

### Tips Accommodations Tip

Most accommodations will require a 1-week minimum stay during school holiday periods and a 4-day minimum stay at Easter and during the Indy car race carnival in October; book well ahead for those times.

**Tips Indy Madness!**

When the **Gold Coast Indy car race** takes over the town for 4 days in October, hotel rates skyrocket and most hostelries demand a minimum stay of 3 or 4 nights. Don't leave accommodations bookings to the last minute! Contact the **Gold Coast Tourism Bureau** (✆ **07/5536 7765;** www.goldcoasttourism.com.au) to find out the exact dates.

spacious, and all have balconies. They are simply but neatly furnished, with a large kitchen and laundry facilities. Like many apartments on the Gold Coast, these are not air-conditioned, but they have ceiling fans and the sea breeze is a good substitute. There are two barbecue areas, and the low-rise (four-story) block makes this a good choice for families or older people.

32 Enderley Ave., Surfers Paradise, QLD 4217. ✆ **1300/553 800** in Australia, or 07/5570 1511. Fax 07/5592 3878. www.enderleygardens.com.au. 86 units. High season A$239 (US$191) double 1-bedroom apt, A$458 (US$366) double 2-bedroom apt.; low season A$165 (US$132) 1-bedroom apt, A$278 (US$222) 2-bedroom apt. Extra person A$30 (US$24). 4-night minimum during Indy race, 5-night minimum at Christmas. AE, DC, MC, V. Free secure covered parking. **Amenities:** Large outdoor pool (heated in winter); wading pool; half-court tennis; Jacuzzi; sauna; playground; tour desk; babysitting. *In room:* TV, kitchen, iron, laundry.

**Equinox Resort** *Value* *Kids* This well-maintained older-style apartment block is just across the road from the beach and a short walk from Cavill Mall and the restaurants and cafes of Main Beach. You can choose between a studio with a balcony and basic tea- and coffee-making facilities, or forego the balcony for a full kitchen in a suite. Or you can connect a studio and suite to make a two-bedroom apartment that has it all. Some of the studios have air-conditioning, and they are ideal for up to three people. There are two barbecue areas, and a rooftop sun deck. It's good value for location, price, and comfort.

3458 Main Beach Parade, Surfers Paradise, QLD 4217. ✆ **1300/553 800** in Australia, or 07/5538 3288. Fax 07/5538 6862. www.equinoxresort.com.au. 90 units. High season A$239 (US$191) studio, A$292 (US$234) suite, A$465 (US$372) 2-bedroom apt.; low season A$165 (US$132) studio, A$177 (US$142) suite, A$282 (US$226) 2-bedroom apt. Extra person A$30 (US$24). 4-night minimum during Indy race, 5-night minimum at Christmas. MC, V. Free underground secure parking. **Amenities:** Outdoor pool (heated in winter); 2 tennis half-courts; squash court; gym; Jacuzzi; sauna; game room; tour desk; babysitting. *In room:* A/C (in some), TV, kitchen (in suites), fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

## WHERE TO DINE

The Gold Coast is full to the rafters with cheap restaurants, especially in and around Cavill Mall. Look for discount coupons in the tourist guides available in hotel lobbies and information booths. Many stylish restaurants and cafes, most reasonably priced, can be found around Surf Parade and Victoria Avenue at Broadbeach, as well as in the Oasis shopping mall. A coffee and an Italian-style gourmet sandwich by the water won't cost the earth at the Marina Mirage shopping center opposite the Sheraton on Sea World Drive at Main Beach, or at one of the Tedder Avenue cafes in Main Beach.

**Elephant Rock Cafe** *Finds* MODERN AUSTRALIAN Take your seat under the pavilion overlooking Currumbin Beach and be mesmerized by the waves. The food's good too, but the view is something else. Elephant Rock is a chic, modern restaurant that's one of the best on the Gold Coast. Whether you go for breakfast, lunch, or dinner you'll not be disappointed with food that includes gourmet vegetarian choices as well as something for those who like more traditional fare. Licensed.

776 Pacific Parade, Currumbin. ✆ **07/5598 2133.** Main courses A$15–A$22 (US$12–US$18). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 7am–10pm.

**Ristorante Fellini** ★ ITALIAN Locals and visitors flock here for the flavors of Italy—mainly from Naples and Tuscany—as well as the fantastic views of the marina and Broadwater. When the temperature is right, the huge windows are opened to let in the sea breeze, and the split-level design means every table gets the same view. For so stylish a place, you'd expect the prices to be sky-high, but they're not. Family-owned, the restaurant is friendly and welcoming, but the service is snappy. The menu includes pasta dishes such as ravioli filled with roasted duck and vegetables cooked with a light duck and tomato reduction, served with grated Parmesan, and a range of chicken, beef, and seafood dishes, including fresh snapper filets pan fried in olive oil with zucchini, shallots, slow-roasted tomato, fresh thyme, and white wine, served baked in a paper envelope.

Level 1, Marina Mirage, Sea World Drive, Main Beach. ✆ **07/5531 0300.** Main courses A$27–A$32 (US$22–US$26). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily noon–10:30pm.

## WHAT TO SEE & DO ON THE COAST

### HITTING THE BEACHES

Needless to say, the wide white sandy beaches are the number-one attraction on the Gold Coast—and best of all, they're free! No fewer than 35 patrolled beaches stretch almost uninterrupted from the Spit north of Surfers Paradise to Rainbow Bay, south of Coolangatta. In fact, the Gold Coast is really just one long fabulous beach—all you need do is step onto it at any point and you will spot the nearest set of red and yellow flags that signal safe swimming. The most popular beaches are **Main Beach, Surfers North, Elkhorn Avenue, Surfers Paradise, Mermaid Beach, Burleigh Heads, Coolangatta,** and **Greenmount** ★. All are patrolled 365 days a year.

Surfers will find a decent wave most places they put in their board, but the best breaks are at Burleigh Heads, Duranbah, and Kirra. **Surfers Beach Club** (✆ **07/5526 7077**), on The Esplanade in front of the Paradise Centre (opposite McDonald's on Cavill Mall), rents surfboards, body boards, in-line skates, and bikes for A$20 to A$25 (US$16–US$20) per 24 hours.

Cavill Mall is a good place for people-watching. Here you will find a **Ripley's Believe It or Not Museum,** souvenir stores, and loads of cheap restaurants. In the **Paradise Centre** on the mall's southern side are more shops, shooting galleries, a bowling alley, electronic video games, bumper cars, and an 18-hole minigolf course.

### DOING THE THEME PARKS

The big three are **Dreamworld, Sea World,** and **Warner Bros. Movie World.** Right next door to Movie World is **Wet 'n' Wild Water World.**

**Sea World** is the only major theme park in the center of town. The others are in northern bushland on the Pacific Highway, about 15 to 20 minutes away from Surfers Paradise. You can ride to the theme parks on the Gold Coast Tourist Shuttle (see earlier in this chapter) or on **Surfside Buslines** (✆ **13 12 30** in Queensland, or 07/5571 6555; www.surfside.com.au) buses. Take bus no. 1A to Dreamworld and Wet 'n' Wild, bus no. 1A or X to Movie World, and bus no. 2 or 9 to Sea World.

If you are driving, take the M1 Pacific Motorway for about 15 to 20 minutes north of the Gold Coast or 40 minutes south of Brisbane for Wet 'n' Wild, Warner Bros. Movie World, and Dreamworld. Exits are all well signposted. All the theme parks have huge free car parks.

Trains (✆ **13 12 30** in Queensland, or 07/3606 5555; www.citytrain.com.au) run to Coomera and Helensvale on the Brisbane–Gold Coast line. Queensland Rail Citytrain sells tickets to the theme parks at attended stations, including Brisbane Central, which saves the time of standing in line to get in, rather than any money.

**Coachtrans** (✆ **13 12 30** in Queensland, or 07/5506 9777) does daily transfers to the big three parks, as well as Wet 'n' Wild and Currumbin Sanctuary. Round-trip fare is A$16 (US$13) for adults, A$8 (US$6.40) for kids, and A$40 (US$32) for families. Book a day ahead if you can, especially in peak season.

**Dreamworld** ★ *Kids* If you're an adrenaline-crazed thrill-seeker, you'll love the action rides, such as the aptly named Giant Drop, in which you free-fall 39 stories in 5 seconds, and the Tower of Terror, which propels you forward and upward at 4.5Gs before you fall backward 38 stories in 7 seconds. You'll also get a kick out of the hair-raising Cyclone roller coaster, with its 360-degree loop, and the Wipeout, which spins, twists, and tumbles you upside down in a random sequence (but only exerts a sissy 2.5Gs of pressure). These high-octane offerings make the park's other attractions look tame. Dreamworld is a family-fun park, Disney-style—except that here giant koalas called Kenny and Belinda roam the streets instead of Mickey Mouse. Kids will love Nick Central, the only Nickelodeon cartoon attraction outside the U.S.

Other activities include an IMAX theater, a wildlife park where you can cuddle a koala and hand-feed kangaroos, river cruises livened up by a bushranger shoot-out, and a carousel and other rides for young kids. A big highlight is to watch trainers swim, wrestle, and play with Bengal tigers on Tiger Island. Souvenir stores, restaurants, cafes, and ice-cream shops abound, and there's a water-slide park, so bring your swimsuit.

Pacific Hwy. (25km/16 miles north of Surfers Paradise), Coomera. ✆ **1800/073 300** in Australia, 07/5588 1111, or 07/5588 1122 (24-hr. info line). www.dreamworld.com.au. Admission (all-inclusive except skill games, souvenir photos, and helicopter rides) A$60 (US$48) adults, A$38 (US$30) children 4–13. Daily 10am–5pm; Main St., Plaza Restaurant, and Koala Country open at 9am. Closed Dec 25 and until 1:30pm Apr 25 (Anzac Day). Extended hours during Easter and Dec–Jan.

**Sea World** ★★ *Kids* Four polar bears—Lia and Lutik, and Canadian orphan cubs Hudson and Nelson—are the star attractions at this marine park, and crowds flock to see them frolic, dive, and hunt for fish in a large pool. The cubs are usually out in the morning, and the bigger bears on show in the afternoon, but you'll probably make a day of it, so you'll get to see them all. A behind-the-scenes tour of their habitat costs A$50 (US$40) for adults, A$25 (US$20) for children 4 to 13 (Mon–Fri only). Sea World may not be as sophisticated as similar parks in the United States, but it has its own charm, plus all the things you'd expect to see—performing dolphins and sea lions, ski shows, an aquarium, shark feeding, and an array of rides. The newest attraction is Shark Bay, a A$13-million (US$10-million) exhibit where you can see some of the larger and more dangerous species, such as tiger sharks. You can also snorkel with the sharks for A$55 (US$44) per person (if you are 10 or over).

A monorail gets you around the park, and there's a free water-slide playground. Watersports are available for an extra fee. The Seal Aqua Adventure gives guests age 14 or over the chance to interact with seals in the water. It costs A$115 (US$92) including a souvenir photo. An hour-long Dolphin Dive Encounter uses "ocean-walker" technology to allow guests without dive qualifications to have a divelike encounter with dolphins. It costs A$170 (US$136) per person (you must be over 13). Younger kids can attend a 30-minute dolphin talk, pat a dolphin, and have their photo taken with one for A$70 (US$56).

Sea World Dr. (3km/1¾ miles north of Surfers Paradise), The Spit, Main Beach. ✆ **07/5588 2222,** or 07/5588 2205 (24-hr. info line). Fax 07/5591 1056. www.seaworld.com.au. Admission (all-inclusive except animal experiences, helicopter rides, and powered watersports) A$60 (US$48) adults, A$38 (US$30) children 4–13. AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 10am–5pm; 1:30–6:30pm Apr 25 (Anzac Day). Closed Dec 25.

**Warner Bros. Movie World** ★ *Kids* Australia's answer to Universal Studios just about matches its U.S. counterpart for thrills and spills. The park is based around working studios where *Scooby Doo,* starring Sarah Michelle Gellar and Freddie Prinze, Jr.; *The Phantom,* starring Billy Zane; *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea,* with Michael Caine; and *Streetfighter,* with Jean-Claude Van Damme, were filmed. If you already know how Superman flies across skyscrapers and you've heard a Foley sound studio in action, the train ride around the sets might not interest you, but it's a great introduction to cinema tricks for first-timers. The newest attraction is a walk-through *Matrix* exhibit. Hair-raising, tummy-turning rides include the indoor Scooby-Doo Spooky Coaster roller coaster, the Lethal Weapon roller coaster, and the simulated high-speed chase of Batman–The Ride. Don't miss the hilarious Police Academy Stunt Show. Young kids can take rides and see stage shows by Yosemite Sam and Porky Pig in the Looney Tunes Village, and there's a Looney Tunes Parade through the streets each day. Most parades and shows take place between 11am and 4pm.

Pacific Hwy. (21km/13 miles north of Surfers Paradise), Oxenford. ✆ **07/5573 3999,** or 07/5573 8485 (recorded info). www.movieworld.com.au. Admission (all-inclusive) A$60 (US$48) adults, A$38 (US$30) children 4–13. AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 9:30am–5:30pm; rides and attractions operate daily 10am–5pm. Closed Dec 25 and until 1:30pm Apr 25 (Anzac Day).

**Wet 'n' Wild Water World** *Kids* Hurtling down a seven-story piece of fiberglass at 70kmph (43 mph) is just one of many water-slide options at this aquatic fun park. The rides have names like Double Screamer, Mammoth Falls, the Twister, Terror Canyon, and White Water Mountain. That says it all. Scaredy-cats can stick to the four regular white-water flumes, float gently past palm-studded "islands" at Calypso Beach, swim in the artificial breakers in the Wave Pool or in the regular pool, or soak in a spa at Whirlpool Springs. There's also a water playground for young kids. Every night in January, and Saturday night September through April, is Dive-In Movie night, during which film fans can recline on a rubber tube in the pool while watching the flick on a giant screen. The park is very popular and very crowded, and to get a tube or a seat you have to get there early. The water is heated to 79°F (26°C) April to September, there are lifeguards on duty, you can rent towels and lockers, and you can use the hot showers. An "afternoon rate" of A$19 (US$15) adults and A$12 (US$9.60) children applies after 3pm, or after 4:30pm on Dive-In Movie nights.

Pacific Hwy. (next to Warner Bros. Movie World), Oxenford. ✆ **07/5556 1610** (administration), or 07/5573 2255 (24-hr. recorded info). www.wetnwild.com.au. Admission A$38 (US$30) adults, A$24 (US$19) children 4–13. AE, DC, MC, V. Jan daily 10am–9pm; Feb and Oct–Dec daily 10am–5pm; Mar–Apr and Sept daily 10am–4:30pm; May–Aug daily 10am–4pm. Closes at 9pm on Dive-In Movie nights. Closed Dec 25 and until 1:30pm Apr 25 (Anzac Day).

## EXPLORING THE WILDLIFE & AUSTRALIAN PARKS

**Currumbin Wildlife Sanctuary** ★ *Kids* Currumbin began life as a bird sanctuary, and it is almost synonymous with the wild rainbow lorikeets that flock here by the hundreds twice a day for feeding. It's quite an experience—flocks of chattering birds descend onto visitors holding trays of food for them. Photographers go crazy, and tourists love it. The amazingly beautiful birds have a vivid green back, blue head, and red-and-yellow chest. Lorikeet feeding is at 8am and 4pm. Don't miss it. You can also have your photo taken cuddling a koala, hand-feed kangaroos, take a free miniature

steam-train ride through the park, or attend animal talks and feeding demonstrations. An Aboriginal song and dance show takes place at 3:30pm daily. The park's 27 hectares (67 acres) are home to 1,400 native birds and animals, including two enormous saltwater crocodiles, and the wetlands on the grounds attract lots of native birds. Allow several hours to see everything. A highlight is the free-flight birds show at 11am and 2pm. Nighttime Wildlight tours are run daily at 7:15pm and last for around 2½ hours. They cost A$49 (US$39) adults and A$27 (US$22) children 4 to 13.

28 Tomewin St., Currumbin (18km/11 miles south of Surfers Paradise). ✆ **07/5534 1266.** www.currumbin-sanctuary.org.au. Admission A$25 (US$20) adults, A$17 (US$14) children 4–13. AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 8am–5pm. Closed Dec 25 and until 1pm Apr 25 (Anzac Day). Bus: 1 or 1A (stop 15m/49 ft. from entrance).

**David Fleay Wildlife Park** ★ *Value* Established in 1952 by Australian naturalist David Fleay, this is one of Australia's premier wildlife parks. You'll see a platypus, saltwater and freshwater crocodiles, wallabies, kangaroos, glider possums, dingoes, wombats, the rare Lumholtz's tree kangaroo, and a range of Australian birds, including emus, cassowaries, wedge-tailed eagles, black swans, and lorikeets. You walk on a series of raised boardwalks through picturesque mangrove, rainforest, and eucalyptus habitats, where most of the animals roam free. The nocturnal house, open daily from 11am to 5pm, is where you'll see many of the most elusive animals, including Australia's answer to the Easter bunny, the bilby. Talks and feeding demonstrations throughout the day include a reptile show and saltwater croc feeding—usually only October through April, when the crocs are hungry. Aboriginal rangers give talks about weaponry, bush medicine, and their links with this region. Volunteers also give free guided tours throughout the day. The Queensland National Parks and Wildlife Service (QNPWS) has run the park since 1983; David Fleay continued to live here until his death in 1993. Because the QNPWS frowns on handling animals, you can't cuddle a koala or hand-feed kangaroos here. There's a cafe, gift shop, and picnic tables.

West Burleigh Rd. (17km/11 miles south of Surfers Paradise), West Burleigh. ✆ **07/5576 2411.** Admission A$13 (US$10) adults, A$8.50 (US$6.80) seniors and students, A$6.50 (US$5.20) children 4–17, A$33 (US$26) families of 6. MC, V. Daily 9am–5pm. Closed Dec 25.

## GETTING ACTIVE

**Surfers Beach Club** (✆ **07/5526 7077**), on The Esplanade in front of the Paradise Centre (opposite McDonald's on Cavill Mall), rents surfboards and other sports gear, including in-line skates, for A$15 (US$12) for 3 hours. For high-powered watersports, contact one of the many operators on The Broadwater at Sea World Drive, such as **Aussie Bob's** (✆ **07/5591 7577**), located at Berth C67 at Marina Mirage.

Follow the screams to **Bungy Australia** (✆ **07/5526 7611**), on the corner of the Gold Coast Highway and Palm Avenue, Surfers Paradise, where you can bungee jump for A$80 (US$64) adults, A$75 (US$60) children between 13 and 16 years old. And there's a video to prove you've done it! Jump between 10am and 10pm daily, or even on Christmas between noon and 10pm.

The Gold Coast boasts more than 40 golf courses. An 18-hole round generally costs about A$100 (US$80), including a cart, with additional charges of around A$30 (US$24) for clubs and A$10 (US$8) for shoes. Grandest is the **Hope Island Golf Club,** Oxenford-Southport Road, Hope Island (✆ **07/5530 9000**), 25 minutes north of Surfers Paradise, designed by the Thomson-Wolveridge team. A 9-hole round is A$75 (US$60), but few golfers can resist going the whole 18 for A$120 (US$96), including cart rental with GPS. Other championship fairways can be found at **The**

**Palms** at the Hyatt Regency Sanctuary Cove Resort, Casey Road, Sanctuary Cove on Hope Island (✆ **07/5577 6031**); **Lakelands,** Gooding Drive, Merrimac (✆ **07/5579 8700**), designed by Jack Nicklaus; and the two 18-hole courses at **Royal Pines Resort,** Ross Street, Ashmore (✆ **07/5597 1111**).

## THE GOLD COAST AFTER DARK

The jeans and T-shirt set love the laid-back **Billy's Beach House** on The Esplanade at Hanlan Street, Surfers Paradise (✆ **07/5531 5666**), for its drinks specials. There's always a live band Sunday nights. At night a dress code of long pants and enclosed shoes (that is, no thongs or sandals) applies. All ages and types frequent **Melba's,** 46 Cavill Ave., Surfers Paradise (✆ **07/5538 7411**), a popular neon-lit dance club. It's open Tuesday to Saturday from 7pm to 5am and Sunday and Monday from 8pm to 5am.

A genuine Rolls Royce parked in the corner at **Rolls** nightclub at the Sheraton Mirage, Sea World Drive, Main Beach (✆ **07/5591 1488**), can be reserved as your booth for the night. A mixed-age crowd of sophisticated locals rubs shoulders with hotel guests. There is a A$5 (US$4) cover; the club is open Friday and Saturday night. At 10:30pm they push back the tables at **Saks,** Marina Mirage, Sea World Drive, Main Beach (✆ **07/5591 2755**), and the elegant cafe/wine bar becomes a dance floor for fashionable 20- and 30-somethings. Friday, Saturday, and Sunday are the coolest nights to turn up; there's a live band Sundays and no cover.

Revelers 20 to 35 years old go to **Shooters Saloon Bar,** in the Mark shopping complex, Orchid Avenue, Surfers Paradise (✆ **07/5592 1144**), for a fun, hip, but not slavishly trendy night of dancing. It's open daily from 8pm to 5am.

It's not as big as some Vegas casinos, but **Conrad Jupiters Casino,** Gold Coast Highway, Broadbeach (✆ **07/5592 8282**), has plenty to keep the gambler amused—70 gaming tables and 1,200-plus slot machines with roulette, blackjack, Caribbean stud poker, baccarat and minibaccarat, craps, pai gow, and sic bo. Downstairs the 1,100-seat Jupiter's Theatre stages floor shows and concerts; and there are three bars, including an English-style pub. Of the five restaurants, the good-value **Food Fantasy** buffet is outrageously popular, so be prepared to wait. The casino is open 24 hours. You must be 18 to enter, and smart, casual dress is required.

Many head for the **Twin Towns Services Club,** Pacific Highway at Marine Parade, Tweed Heads (✆ **1800/014 014** in Australia, or 07/5536 1977 for bookings), for the 400 slot machines, keno, and Club Tab for sports betting, but you can also catch popular—if somewhat dated—acts like Leo Sayer, Kris Kristofferson, Alice Cooper, Nana Mouskouri, and tribute bands in the Auditorium (tickets A$20–A$35/US$16–US$28). Live music plays every afternoon and evening. Free recent-release movies are shown every Monday at 11am and 7pm in the Level 6 showroom. Although the club is over

### *Value* Golf on the Cheap

Hitting the links on the Gold Coast doesn't have to cost you an arm and a leg. At the cheap and cheerful end of the spectrum is **Emerald Lakes Golf Course** on Nerang-Broadbeach Road (at Alabaster Dr.), Carrara (✆ **07/5594 4400**). The championship course welcomes all comers for just A$24 (US$19) for 9 holes or A$44 (US$35) for 18 holes on a par-72 course. You can even play under floodlights at night until 9.30pm. The course is 10 minutes inland from Surfers Paradise.

the state border by a matter of meters, it ignores NSW daylight saving and runs on Queensland time year-round. Admission is free.

## 10 The Gold Coast Hinterland: Back to Nature

The cool, green Gold Coast hinterland is only a half-hour drive from the Coast but is a world away from the neon lights, theme parks, and crowds. Up here, at an altitude of 500 to 1,000m (about 1,500–3,500 ft.), the tree ferns drip moisture, the air is crisp, and there's no pressure to do anything too quickly.

Mt. Tamborine shelters several villages known for their crafts shops, galleries, cafes, and lovely B&Bs. Easy walking trails wander from the streets through rainforest and eucalyptus woodland, and as you drive you will discover magnificent views.

The impressive 20,000-hectare (50,000-acre) **Lamington National Park** ★ lies to the south of Mt. Tamborine. The park, at around 1,000m (3,328 ft.) above sea level, is a refreshing eucalyptus and rainforest wilderness crisscrossed with walking trails. It's famous for its rich, colorful bird life, wallabies, possums, and other wildlife. The road to the park is full of twists and turns, and as you wind higher and higher, gnarled tangled vines, dense eucalyptus, and ferns make a canopy across the road so dark you need your car headlights on. The park is about 90 minutes from the coast—but once you're ensconced in your mountain retreat, the world will seem remote.

The hinterland is close enough to the Gold Coast and Brisbane to make a pleasant day trip, but you will almost certainly want to stay overnight, or longer, once you breathe that restorative mountain air.

### MT. TAMBORINE

40km (24 miles) NW of Surfers Paradise; 70km (42 miles) S of Brisbane

Crafts shops, teahouses, and idyllic mountain vistas bring visitors to Mt. Tamborine. The mountaintop is more a plateau than a peak, and it's home to a string of villages, all a kilometer or so apart—Eagle Heights, North Tamborine, and Mt. Tamborine proper. Many of the shops and cafes are only open Thursday, Friday, and weekends.

#### ESSENTIALS

**GETTING THERE & GETTING AROUND** From the Gold Coast, head to Nerang and follow signs to Beaudesert. The Mt. Tamborine turnoff is off this road. Alternatively, take the Pacific Highway north to Oxenford and take the Mt. Tamborine turnoff, the first exit after Warner Bros. Movie World. Many tour operators run minibus and four-wheel-drive day trips from the Gold Coast, and some run tours from Brisbane. An alternative to the tours is to pay A$25 (US$20) for the day to ride the **Tamborine Trolley Co.** buses (✆ **07/5545 2782**), modeled on early-20th-century trams, which run on a 25km (16-mile) circuit linking four wineries, a distillery, a pub, cafes, restaurants, antiques shops, markets, galleries, hang-gliding lookouts, and rainforest walks. The circuit takes an hour, and you can hop on and off as you like. Owner-operator Sue Netherway will organize transport to Mt. Tamborine on request. She also runs an hour-long "discovery" tour for A$10 (US$8) per person and a full-day food and wine tour every Thursday and Friday for A$70 (US$56), or A$95 (US$76) with pick-up from the Gold Coast.

**VISITOR INFORMATION** Head to the **Gold Coast Tourism Bureau** (see "Visitor Information" under "The Gold Coast," earlier in this chapter) to stock up on information and tourist maps before you set off. Brisbane Marketing (see "Visitor

Information" in chapter 6) also has information. The **Tamborine Mountain Information Centre** is in Doughety Park, where Geissmann Drive joins Main Western Road in North Tamborine (✆ **07/5545 3200;** www.tamborinemtncc.org.au). It's open daily from 10:30am to 3:30pm.

### WHERE TO STAY: A RAINFOREST B&B

**Tamborine Mountain Bed & Breakfast** ✭ Ideally situated close to rainforest walks, arts and craft shops, wineries, and restaurants, Tony and Pam Lambert's restful timber home has stunning 180-degree views to the ocean from the breakfast balcony. Laze by the open fire in the timber-lined living room or on the lovely veranda where rainbow lorikeets, kookaburras, and crimson rosellas flit about over the bird feeders. The ferny gardens have four rustic timber rooms, each individually decorated in cottage style and linked to the house by a covered walkway. Rooms are heated in winter. No smoking indoors.

19–23 Witherby Crescent, Eagle Heights, QLD 4721. ✆ **07/5545 3595.** Fax 07/5545 3322. www.tmbb.com.au. 4 units (all with shower only). A$130 (US$104) double midweek; A$160 (US$128) double weekend. Rates include continental breakfast Mon–Fri, full breakfast weekends. MC, V. Free parking. Children under 12 not accepted. **Amenities:** Nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV/VCR, fridge, coffeemaker, iron.

### EXPLORING THE MOUNTAIN

With a map in hand, you are well equipped to drive around Mt. Tamborine's roads to admire the wonderful views over the valleys and to poke around in the shops. New Age candles, homemade soaps, maple pecan fudge, framed tropical watercolors, German cuckoo clocks, and Aussie antiques are some of the things you can buy in the mountain's crafts stores. The best place to shop is the quaint strip of galleries, cafes, and shops known as Gallery Walk on Long Road, between North Tamborine and Eagle Heights. Eagle Heights has few shops but great views back toward the coast. North Tamborine is mainly a commercial center where you still find the odd nice gallery or two. Mt. Tamborine itself is mainly residential.

The cool air has lent itself to winemaking, still in its infancy in this neck of the woods, and you can spend a pleasant day visiting some or all of the wineries in the region. Most cellar doors are open for free tastings daily from 10am to 4pm.

Allow time to walk some of the trails that wind through forest throughout the villages. Most are reasonably short and easy. The Tamborine Mountain Information Centre has maps marking them.

## LAMINGTON NATIONAL PARK

70km (42 miles) W of Gold Coast; 115km (69 miles) S of Brisbane

Subtropical rainforest, 2,000-year-old moss-covered Antarctic beech trees, giant strangler figs, and misty mountain air characterize Lamington's suddenly ascending peaks and plunging valleys. It's one of the most important subtropical parks in southeast Queensland, and one of the loveliest. The park has 160km (96 miles) of walking trails that track through thick forest, past ferny waterfalls, and along mountain ridges with soaring views across green valleys. The trails vary in difficulty and length, from 1km (.5-mile) strolls up to 23km (14-mile) treks. The park is a haven for bird lovers who come to see and photograph the rosellas, bowerbirds, and other species that live here, but that's not the only wildlife you will see. Groups of small wallabies, called *pademelons,* graze outside your room. In summer you may see giant carpet pythons curled up in a tree or large goannas sunning themselves on rock ledges. Near streams a hissing Lamington spiny crayfish, an aggressive little monster 15 centimeters (6 in.) long, patterned in royal blue

### Tips Exploring Lamington National Park

The easiest way to explore the park is to base yourself at **O'Reilly's Rainforest Guesthouse** in the Green Mountains section of the park or at **Binna Burra Mountain Lodge** in the Binna Burra section (see "Where to Stay & Dine: Worth a Splurge," below). Most trails lead from one or the other of these resorts, and a 23km (14-mile) Border Trail connects them; it follows the New South Wales–Queensland border for much of the way and can be walked by most reasonably fit folk in a day. Guided walks and activities at both resorts are for guests only; however, both properties welcome day visitors who just want to walk the trails for free. Both have inexpensive cafes for day-trippers.

It's a good idea to bring a torch (flashlight) and maybe binoculars for wildlife spotting. The temperature is often 10°F to 20°F (4°C–5°C) cooler than on the Gold Coast, so bring a sweater in summer and bundle up in winter when nights get close to freezing. September to October is orchid season, and the frogs come out in noisy abundance in February and March.

and white, may challenge you. The park comes alive with owls, possums, and sugar gliders at night.

Most visitors are fascinated by the park's Antarctic beech trees, which begin to appear above the 1,000m (3,330-ft.) line. Like something from a medieval fairy tale, these mossy monarchs of the forest stand 20m (66 ft.) tall and measure up to 8m (26 ft.) in girth. They are survivors of a time when Australia and Antarctica belonged to the super-continent, Gondwana, when it was covered by wet, tropical rainforest. The species survived the last ice age, and the trees at Lamington are about 2,000 years old, with suckered-off root systems about 8,000 years old. The trees are a 2½-hour walk from O'Reilly's Rainforest Guesthouse (see below).

## ESSENTIALS

**GETTING THERE** **By Car** O'Reilly's is 37km (22 miles) from the town of Canungra. The road is very twisty, so take it slowly, allow yourself an hour from Canungra to reach O'Reilly's, and plan to arrive before dark. Binna Burra is 35km (21 miles) from Nerang via Beechmont, or 26km (16 miles) from Canungra, on a similarly winding mountain road. From the Gold Coast go west to Nerang, where you can turn off to Binna Burra via Beechmont, or go on to Canungra where you will see the O'Reilly's and Binna Burra turnoffs. From Brisbane, follow the Pacific Highway south and take the Beenleigh/Mt. Tamborine exit to Mt. Tamborine. From there follow the signs to Canungra. Allow a good 2½ hours to get to either resort from Brisbane and 90 minutes from the Gold Coast. Binna Burra sells unleaded fuel; O'Reilly's has emergency supplies only.

**By Coach** The **Mountain Coach Company** (✆ **07/5524 4249**) does daily transfers to O'Reilly's and Binna Burra from the Gold Coast, leaving the airport at 8am, picking up at hotels along the way, and arriving at O'Reilly's at around noon. The return trip leaves O'Reilly's at 2:30pm, arriving at the airport by 5:30pm. **Allstate Scenic Tours** (✆ **07/3003 0700**) makes a daily coach run from outside the Roma Street Transit Centre in Brisbane at 8:30am, arriving at O'Reilly's at 12:30pm. The return trip leaves O'Reilly's at 2pm and gets to Brisbane at 6pm.

The Binna Burra resort runs a shuttle from Gold Coast Airport at 1:30pm daily and from Nerang railway station at 2pm, arriving at Binna Burra at 3pm. Reserve a spot when booking accommodations.

**DAY TRIPS** Companies running day tours from both Brisbane and the Gold Coast include **Australian Day Tours** (✆ **1300/363 436** in Australia, or 07/3236 4155). The Gold Coast Tourism Bureau can get you in touch with other operators; see "Visitor Information," in section 9, above.

**VISITOR INFORMATION** The best sources of hiking information are O'Reilly's Rainforest Guesthouse and Binna Burra Mountain Lodge (see "Where to Stay & Dine: Worth a Splurge," below, for both); ask them to send you copies of their walking maps. There is a national parks information office at both properties. For detailed information on hiking and camping in the park, contact the **ranger** at Lamington National Park, Green Mountains Section (which is at O'Reilly's), P.M.B. 4 via Canungra, QLD 7511 (✆ **07/5544 0634**).

## WHERE TO STAY & DINE: WORTH A SPLURGE

Both these mountaintop retreats have long and interesting histories. Both offer walking trails of a similar type and distance; guided walks, including nighttime wildlife-spotting trips; hearty food; and a restful, enjoyable experience. Look into the special-interest workshops both properties run throughout the year, which can be anything from gourmet weekends to mountain-jogging programs.

**Binna Burra Mountain Lodge** ★★ *Kids* Binna Burra is a postcard-perfect mountain lodge. The original cabins, built in 1935, are still in use; they've been outfitted with modern comforts but not with contemporary "inconveniences," such as telephones, televisions, radios, and clocks. All the accommodations have pine-paneled walls, floral bedcovers, heaters, and electric blankets. The most attractive and spacious are the mud-brick and weatherboard Acacia cabins, which have private bathrooms and the best views over the Numinbah Valley. The two kinds of Casuarina cabins are less expensive—the nicest are the small and very cozy huts with a pitched ceiling, a washbasin, and a nice aspect into the forest and over the valley. Less atmospheric are the units that sleep four to six people on bunk beds—good for families and groups of friends. Guests in Casuarina cabins share bathroom facilities, which include a Jacuzzi. Meals are served in the lovely stone-and-timber dining room. Seating is communal, so you get to meet other travelers. Free tea and coffee are on the boil all day. Also here are a crafts shop, a natural history library, and conference rooms.

Of the 21 trails leading from the lodge, 9 are walks of less than 6km (3.75 miles). The 12 longer trails range from a 9km (5.5-mile) walk through "dry" rainforest to the 23km (14-mile) Border Trail to O'Reilly's. On Tuesday the resort buses hikers to O'Reilly's so they can spend the day walking back to Binna Burra. The lodge also conducts abseiling (rappelling) for anyone from beginners to advanced adventurers. Evening diversions might consist of parlor games, a bush dance, or slide presentations on local natural history. Kids can entertain themselves in the excellent playground.

Beechmont via Canungra, QLD 4211. ✆ **1800/074 260** in Australia, or 07/5533 3622. Fax 07/5533 3747. www.BinnaBurralodge.com.au. 41 cabins, 22 with bathroom (shower only). A$154–A$312 (US$123–US$250) B&B-only double; A$234–A$504 (US$187–US$403) double with all-inclusive meals and activities. A$40 (US$32) B&B or A$65 (US$52) all-inclusive for extra child 5–14. Ask about packages. 2-night minimum weekends, 3-night minimum public holiday weekends, 4-night minimum at Easter, 5–night minimum at Christmas. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; free kids' club (ages 5–14) Sat and school vacations; babysitting; coin-op laundry. *In room:* Minibar, fridge, coffeemaker, no phone.

**O'Reilly's Rainforest Guesthouse** ★★ *Kids* Highlights of your stay will be the chance to hand-feed brilliantly colored rainforest birds every morning and the fact that the staff will remember you by name. Nestled high on a cleared plateau, the buildings are closed in on three sides by dense tangled rainforest and open to picturesque mountain views to the west. The rainforest begins right at the parking lot, from which 19 trails fan out through the bush. For those who don't want to venture too far, the **Treetop Walk** is just a few meters from the resort. You can walk the 15m-high (49-ft.) suspension bridge through the forest canopy and climb to the two treetop observation decks 30m (98 ft.) aboveground for unbelievable views. One of the nicest trails is the 7.5km (4.5-mile) round-trip to **Elabana Falls,** which takes about half a day. Staff runs half-day and full-day guided walks, and half-day four-wheel-drive bus trips. Every night there is a slide show on the area's wildlife or history. You may also enjoy spotlighting walks to see possums, glow-worms, and, in season, luminous fungi.

The timber resort complex is inviting, with upmarket new suites and a major refurbishment of older rooms adding a touch of luxury. The comfortable guest lounge has an open fire, old-fashioned sofas and chairs, and a piano. The six rooms in the Toolona block, built in the 1930s, have communal bathrooms and basic furniture. The six refurbished motel-style Garden View rooms have handcrafted maple furniture. The seven Bithongabel rooms are singles. Mountain View rooms look out to the McPherson Ranges and have balconies; the six family rooms in this block have bunks for kids, and two rooms have wheelchair access. Three large Canopy Suites have a king-size four-poster bed, fireplace, Jacuzzi, library, stereo/CD player, minibar, and bar. One of the former O'Reilly family homes has been transformed into two new guest units, called "Vince" and "Lona" after the second-generation couple who raised their 10 children in the house. Each unit has two bedrooms (one with a king-size four-poster), two bathrooms, a separate living room, and a two-way fireplace. The decks have a Jacuzzi, from which you can look out to magical sunsets. Polished timber floors, cedar shutters, maple furniture, a minibar, and a stereo add the final touches.

At mealtime, the maitre d' assigns you to a table in the dining room, so you get to meet other guests. If you do not buy a meal package, buffet breakfasts and lunches cost A$26 (US$21) each, and a three-course dinner is A$48 (US$38). Before dinner, head to the hexagonal timber bar, perched up high for great sunset views, for half-price cocktails (5–6:30pm). Among other facilities are a cafe and gift shop, a basketball court, and free tea, coffee, and cookies all day.

Via Canungra, Lamington National Park Rd., Lamington National Park, QLD 4275. ✆ **1800/688 722** in Australia, or 07/5544 0644. www.oreillys.com.au. 72 units. A$160 (US$128) Bithongabel single; A$200–A$325 (US$160–US$260) double; A$480 (US$384) canopy suite; A$750 (US$600) 2-bedroom suite. Children under 18 stay free w/existing bedding. Free crib. 2-night-minimum weekends, 3-night-minimum long weekends, 4-night- minimum New Year's, Easter, and Christmas. Ask about 2-night and longer packages. Meal plan A$84 (US$67) adults, A$42 (US$34) children 11–15, A$26 (US$21) children 4–10 for 3 meals per day; 2-meal packages available. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; heated outdoor plunge pool; lit tennis court; Jacuzzi; sauna; kids' club (age 6 and up) on weekends and school vacations; game room; massage; babysitting; coin-op laundry; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* Minibar (in some), fridge, coffeemaker.

## CAMPING

**Binna Burra Campsite** ★ Binna Burra Mountain Lodge's campsite is perched on the hill a few hundred meters from the main building. Permanent tents have screened windows, pine beds, table settings, and electric lighting. They have great valley views from a private veranda. Campers may pay to take part in the lodge activities and eat in the dining room if it's not full. The on-site store sells basic take-out food and groceries

that you can cook on the coin-operated gas barbecues (bring your own cutlery and crockery). You share shower blocks (and the showers are hot), and there's a public pay phone. If you want a campfire, buy wood before you arrive. Advance bookings are essential and should be made at least 24 hours ahead.

Beechmont via Canungra, QLD 4211. ✆ **1800/074 260** in Australia, or 07/5533 3622. Fax 07/5533 3747. www.binnaburralodge.com.au. 8 powered campsites, 12 unpowered tent sites; 17 permanent tents (none with bathroom). Tent sites A$10 (US$8) adult, A$7 (US$5.60) seniors and students, A$30 (US$24) families of 5; powered site A$3.50 (US$2.80) extra per person per night. Half-price for children 5–14. Permanent tents A$40 (US$32) for a 2-person tent, A$60 (US$48) for a 4-person tent (double and 2 singles). Ask about weekly discounts. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; coin-op laundry.

## 11 Outback Queensland

Spread over 3,000km (1,875 miles), the Outback is a heart-stopping land of clear blue skies, burnished sunsets, rolling plains, rugged ranges, and endless vistas. Populated with colorful characters that could have walked off a movie set, the Outback is the heart and soul of Queensland. This is where the Aussie tradition of mateship was born, as pioneering cattlemen and their families battled the elements to make a go of it. The Queensland Outback is the birthplace of Australian legends like Waltzing Matilda. History comes alive when you get to places like the Burke River at Boulia, where explorers Burke and Wills filled their water bags and modern-day travelers are invited to do the same, or at Lark Quarry, where dinosaurs once roamed.

The main centers of Queensland Outback life are the towns of Charleville, Barcaldine, Longreach, and Winton, and the mining town of Mt. Isa. They may be small, but they offer a view of this vast state completely different than the one you will get on the coast, and they are definitely worth the effort it takes to get to them.

### LONGREACH

700km (437 miles) W of Rockhampton; 1,286km (804 miles) NW of Brisbane.

With a population of about 4,500, Longreach is the largest town in Queensland's Central West. One of the biggest surprises for first-time visitors to Longreach is that the town is set on the banks of a wide brown river, the Thomson. And after a hard day's traveling or sightseeing around Longreach, there's nothing more relaxing than a sunset cruise on the river or a campfire on its banks. This is bush ranger country, and wherever you go in this area, you'll hear the story of Captain Starlight, the cattle rustler who's become part of local folklore—it's one of those stories which gets better with each telling and which has been immortalized in the classic Australian novel *Robbery Under Arms* by Rolfe Boldrewood. There's plenty to do in Longreach, and tour operators are on hand to take the difficulty out of the distances involved.

**GETTING THERE** **By Car** From Brisbane, Longreach is 1,286km (804 miles) northwest. Take the Warrego Highway west through Toowoomba and Roma, heading toward Charleville. About 90km (56 miles) before Charleville, head north to Augathella and join the Matilda Highway. From there it is about 320km (200 miles) to Barcaldine, and from there another 108km (67 miles) west to Longreach. From Rockhampton, the Capricorn Highway heads almost directly west through Emerald and Alpha for about 590km (369 miles) before joining the Matilda Highway.

**By Plane** **Qantaslink** (✆ **13 13 13** in Australia, or 800/227-4500 in the U.S. and Canada) flies into historic Longreach Airport from Brisbane daily.

**By Train** **Queensland Rail Traveltrain** (✆ **13 22 32** in Australia, or 07/3235 1122) runs the train *Spirit of the Outback* from Brisbane to Longreach via Rockhampton every Tuesday and Saturday, returning on Thursday and Monday. From Brisbane, it's A$171 (US$137) for a seat or A$227 to A$358 (US$182–US$286) for a sleeper. Alternatively, you can join the train at Rockhampton on Wednesday or Sunday. The trip takes about 24½ hours from Brisbane or 13½ hours from Rockhampton.

**By Bus** **Greyhound Australia** (✆ **13 14 99** in Australia, or 07/4690 9950) runs between Brisbane and Longreach daily. The trip takes 17½ hours and costs A$114 (US$91).

**VISITOR INFORMATION** **The Longreach Visitor Information Centre** is at Qantas Park, Longreach, QLD 4730 (✆ **07/4658 3555;** fax 07/4658 3733). Another good source of information is the **Outback Queensland Tourism Authority** (✆ **07/3236 4996**) in Brisbane.

**GETTING AROUND** Rental-car companies **Avis** (✆ **13 63 33** in Australia, or 07/4658 3541) and **Budget** (✆ **07/4658 0300**) both have agents in Longreach.

Several tour companies offer tours in and around Longreach and to other Central West Outback towns. One of the best is Alan and Sue Smith's **Outback Aussie Tours** ★★ (✆ **1300/787 890** in Australia; www.outbackaussietours.com.au), which runs trips taking in Longreach, Ilfracombe, Winton, and Barcaldine, as well as the Lark Quarry dinosaur site. **Longreach Outback Travel Centre** (✆ **07/4658 1776;** www.lotc.com.au) has information on a variety of tours.

## WHERE TO STAY

**Albert Park Motor Inn** The Albert Park is just 200m (660 ft.) from the airport (and Qantas Founders Museum) and 500m (1600 ft.) from the Australian Stockmen's Hall of Fame. It's about 1.5km (just under a mile) to the center of town. The Oasis restaurant is open for dinner daily and is usually open for breakfast in high season (Easter–Oct). The a la carte dinner menu offers large meals at reasonable prices. There are nonsmoking rooms, and hair dryers are provided on request.

Sir Hudson Fysh Dr., Longreach, QLD 4730. ✆ **1800/821 811** in Australia, or 07/4658 2411. Fax 07/4658 3181. 56 units (with shower only). A$94 (US$75) single; A$105 (US$84) double. Extra adult A$15 (US$12), extra child under 15 A$10 (US$8). AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; shaded heated saltwater pool; children's wading pool; Jacuzzi; tour desk; room service (breakfast and dinner only); laundry; dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/free movies, minibar, fridge, coffeemaker, iron.

## THE TOP ATTRACTIONS

**Australian Stockman's Hall of Fame & Outback Heritage Centre** ★★★ This should be the first stop on any visit to Longreach. I could spend all day at the Hall of Fame, but try to allow at least 4 hours. A tribute to the pioneers who developed the Outback, the center honors explorers, stockmen, poets, and artists. Part museum, part memorial, part interactive display, this world-class attraction is educational, entertaining, and quite amazing. Exhibits are updated regularly and give a fascinating insight into the Aboriginal and European history of Australia, blending modern technology with artifacts and relics of a bygone age.

Ilfracombe Rd. ✆ **07/4658 2166.** Fax 07/4658 2495. www.outbackheritage.com.au. Admission A$20 (US$16) adults, A$10 (US$8) children 8–17, A$45 (US$36) families. Daily 9am–5pm. Closed Christmas Day.

**Longreach School of Distance Education** Tours of this unique school system—also known as the School of the Air—will give you insight into the isolation of Outback

families. You can watch a teacher conducting on-air lessons via two-way radio to students on far-flung stations. Hundreds of children in western Queensland take advantage of this form of education.

Sir James Walker Dr. ✆ **07/4658 4222.** Admission A$3 (US$2.40) adults, A$1 (US80¢) seniors and children. Guided tours at 9 and 10am on school days only.

**Qantas Founders Outback Museum** Anyone who's ever flown on Australia's first airline will be interested in this tribute to pioneer aviators. Longreach is the original home of Qantas, as the airline's operational base from 1922 to 1934, when Australia's first six aircraft were built here. During World War II, Longreach was used as a base by U.S. Flying Fortress bombers for their Pacific operations. The original hangar is now complemented by a A$9-million (US$7.2-million) world-class museum, with the main exhibit a full-size replica of an AVRO 504K, a 747 Jumbo, the first type of aircraft operated by Qantas. Tours of the 747 must be reserved and cost A$12 (US$9.60) adults, A$10 (US$8) seniors, A$6 (US$4.80) children, and A$25 (US$20) for families. They take about 60 to 90 minutes. Located at the airport, opposite the Australian Stockman's Hall of Fame, this sleek building, which resembles an aircraft hangar, contrasts perfectly with the original hangar.

Qantas hangar, Longreach Airport. ✆ **07/4658 3737.** www.qfom.com.au. Admission A$16 (US$13) adults, A$13 (US$10) seniors, A$8 (US$6.40) children 7–16, A$38 (US$30) families. Daily 9am–5pm. Closed Christmas Day.

## OTHER THINGS TO SEE & DO

Thomson River cruises—usually at sunset—are run by two local companies, **Billabong Boat Cruises** and **Yellowbelly Express River Cruises.** A 3-hour cruise with **Yellowbelly Express** ★ includes pickup from Longreach accommodations and dinner, and costs A$44 (US$35) adults, A$28 (US$22) children 3 to 14, and A$10 (US$8) children under 3. Billabong operates the *Thomson Belle*, the only paddle wheeler in Western Queensland. The dinner cruise costs A$44 (US$35) adults, A$40 (US$32) seniors, A$30 (US$24) children 3 to 14, and A$10 (US$8) children under 3. BYO drinks for both cruises. At the end of the night, you'll be entertained by some of the local talent, which could be bush poetry or a sing-along. Both can be booked through the Longreach Outback Travel Centre, ✆ **07/4658 1776.**

Take a half-day tour to Oakley Station to experience life on a cattle and sheep property. The station is a 15-minute drive from town, so you won't be spending a lot of time getting there. Four generations of the Forrest family have farmed this land, with Brahmin cattle and merino sheep. The 3-hour tour operates on Wednesdays only and includes morning tea with the Forrests. It costs A$40 (US$32) adults, A$25 (US$20) children, and can be booked through **Longreach Outback Travel Centre** (✆ **07/4658 1776**).

A 30-minute drive from Longreach is the small town of **Ilfracombe.** Attractions include the folk museum, with its large collection of old vehicles, including a horse-drawn wool wagon, sulkies, cart, and farm machinery. The museum also has a turn-of-the-20th-century police cell and a collection of Aboriginal artifacts, historic photographs, and early pioneering silver and china.

Stop at the historic Wellshot Hotel in Ilfracombe for a cool drink. Named for the largest sheep station in the world in its heyday, the pub is a popular local watering hole.

## WINTON

175km (109 miles) NW of Longreach; 150km (93 miles) NW of Brisbane; 470km (294 miles) E of Mt. Isa

Winton is best known as the place where Banjo Paterson wrote "Waltzing Matilda" in 1885, for which the nearby Combo Waterhole was the inspiration. The town has a population of 1,200 and most of its major attractions are linked to the song.

**GETTING THERE & AROUND** The nearest car rental agency is in Longreach. Roads are all sealed between Winton, Longreach, and Mt. Isa. **Greyhound Australia** (✆ **13 14 99** in Australia, or 07/4690 9950) has daily coach services between Longreach and Winton. The trip takes about 3 hours and costs A$29 (US$23). Coach connections from Longreach to Winton are also available to passengers on the *Spirit of the Outback* train (**Queensland Rail Traveltrain;** ✆ **13 22 32** in Australia, or 07/3235 1122). The fare from Brisbane is A$191 (US$153) for a seat or A$248 to A$378 (US$198–US$302) per person for a sleeper.

### On the Dinosaur Trail

Few people know that Steven Spielberg's inspiration for a scene in blockbuster *Jurassic Park* was a fossil discovery in Outback Queensland . . . the stampeding footprints of 150 terrified *coelurosaurs* and ornithopods at Lark Quarry.

Lark Quarry (✆ **07/4657 1188;** www.dinosaurtrackways.com.au) is one of the most amazing fossil sites in the world, recording a dramatic moment in time 95 million years ago, when the hot, dusty area outside Winton was once a small prehistoric lake. A large flesh-eating carnosaur trapped around 150 smaller *coelurosaurs* and ornithopods at the lake edge, causing them to flee in panic.

It is the only surviving record of a dinosaur stampede on Earth. The trackways were undiscovered until 1962. Recent multimillion-dollar conservation works include a protective building over the tracks to conserve the footprints by controlling the temperature, humidity, and moisture levels, and an elevated walkway for best viewing and photography of the tracks. A lookout offers panoramic views over the vast Lark Quarry environmental park. There are also interpretive displays, picnic tables, and toilets.

Lark Quarry is 110km (69 miles) southwest of Winton (about a 2-hr. drive), on the unsealed Jundah Road. Before setting out, check road conditions and directions with Waltzing Matilda Centre (✆ **07/4657 1466**). Several companies operate tours from Winton and Longreach, including Carisbrooke Tours (✆ **07/4657 3984**) and **Outback Aussie Tours** (✆ **1300/787 890** in Australia; www.outbackaussietours.com.au).

Lark Quarry is open daily from 9am to 4pm. Admission is A$9 (US$7.20) adults, A$5 (US$4) children, and A$22 (US$18) for families. Free guided tours are run daily at 10am, noon, and 2pm. For more information call the **Winton Visitor Information Centre** (✆ **1300/665 115** in Australia, or 07/4657 1466).

**VISITOR INFORMATION** **Waltzing Matilda Centre** is at Elderslie Street, Winton (✆ **07/4657 1466;** fax 07/4567 1886; www.matildacentre.com.au). Or try the **Outback Queensland Tourism Authority** (✆ **07/3236 4996**) in Brisbane for information before you arrive. If you're planning to spend a few days here, buy a "Shin Plaster" pass to Winton's attractions for A$15 (US$12) adults, A$40 (US$32) families. For A$22 (US$18) per person or A$50 (US$40) families, it also covers admission to the Lark Quarry dinosaur tracks.

## WHERE TO STAY

**Boulder Opal Motor Inn** This is Winton's newest motel, a family-owned business that opened in 2000. All rooms have a queen-size and a single bed, and two rooms are specially designed for people with disabilities. The licensed restaurant, Matrix, has an Outback theme, but that doesn't extend to the cuisine, which is more Mediterranean-inspired. It is open daily for breakfast and Monday to Saturday for dinner. The reception area has a great display of handcrafted opal jewelry (the owners are also active in local opal mining). The motel is only 500m (1,600 ft.) from the Waltzing Matilda Centre.

16 Elderslie St., Winton, QLD 4735. ✆ **07/4657 1211.** Fax 07/4657 1331. www.boulderopalmotorinn.com.au. 26 units (with shower only). A$88 (US$70) single; A$95 (US$76) double; A$145 (US$116) 2-bedroom unit. Extra person A$12 (US$9.60). AE, DC, MC, V. Free covered parking. Free airport shuttle. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor pool; tour desk; limited room service; coin-op laundry; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, coffeemaker.

## OTHER TOP ATTRACTIONS

**Waltzing Matilda Centre** Dedicated to Australia's most famous song, written by the Banjo Paterson in 1898 at Dagworth Station, near Winton, the center uses modern technology and interactive displays to celebrate the writer's life and times and the role his song has played in Australia's psyche. There's also an art gallery, local history museum, restaurant, and gift shop.

**Combo Waterhole Conservation Park** (✆ **07/4652 7333**), believed to be the inspiration for Waltzing Matilda, is a short drive off the Matilda Highway, about 150km (94 miles) north of Winton. It is then a 40-minute walk from the parking lot to the waterhole.

50 Elderslie St. ✆ **07/4657 1466.** Fax 07/4567 1886. www.matildacentre.com.au. Admission A$14 (US$11) adults, A$12 (US$9.60) seniors and children, A$30 (US$24) families. Daily 8.30am–5pm (until 4pm Dec–Feb); Good Friday 10am–4pm. Closed Christmas.

# MT. ISA

893km (558 miles) W of Townsville; 633km (395 miles) NW of Longreach

Mt. Isa is Queensland's largest city west of the Great Dividing Range. The town was built around mining, and the population of 22,000 reflects that in the 50 different nationalities represented. The Mt. Isa Mine dominates the town. It is the world's largest producer of copper, silver, lead, and zinc. A highlight of the year is the annual **Mt. Isa Rodeo** (✆ **1800/763 361** in Australia, or 07/4743 2706; www.isarodeo.com.au), every August. It's the biggest rodeo in the southern hemisphere.

**GETTING THERE** **By Car** Mt. Isa is 893km (558 miles) west of Townsville on the Flinders Highway. From Longreach, take the Landsborough Highway northwest through Winton and on to Cloncurry. Mt. Isa is about 120km (75 miles) west of Cloncurry on the Barkly Highway. The total trip from Longreach is 633km (395 miles). Motorists should check all road conditions with local authorities before setting out.

**By Train** **Queensland Rail Traveltrain** (✆ **13 22 32** in Australia, or 07/3235 1122) operates the *Inlander* train from Townsville to Mt. Isa every Sunday and Wednesday, returning on Monday and Friday. The 977km (610-mile) journey takes 22 hours and costs A$116 (US$93) per adult for a seat or A$172 to A$268 (US$138–US$214) for a sleeper.

**By Bus** **Greyhound Australia** (✆ **13 14 99** in Australia, or 07/4690 9950) services Mt. Isa from Townsville. The trip takes about 12 hours and costs A$121 (US$97) one-way.

**By Plane** **Qantas** (✆ **13 13 13** in Australia, or 800/227-4500 in the U.S. and Canada; www.qantas.com.au) serves Mt. Isa from Brisbane. **Macair** (book through Qantas) flies to Mt. Isa from Cairns and Townsville.

**VISITOR INFORMATION** **Mt. Isa Tourist Information Centre** is at the Riversleigh Fossils Centre, 19 Marian St., Mt. Isa, QLD 4825 (✆ **1300/659 660** in Australia, or 07/4749 1555; fax 07/4743 6296; www.riversleigh.qld.gov.au).

**GETTING AROUND** Car hire companies **Avis** (✆ **07/4743 3733**) and **Budget** (✆ **13 27 27** in Australia, or 07/4749 1828) both have offices in Mt. Isa.

## WHERE TO STAY & DINE

Mt. Isa has plenty of accommodations, from backpacker hostels and caravan parks to host farms and four-star hotels. Make sure your lodgings are air-conditioned because you'll need it.

**All Seasons Burke & Wills** This is Mt. Isa's best hotel and it's right in the heart of town, just a A$11 (US$8.80) taxi ride from the airport or A$6 (US$4.80) from the bus or train station. In this heat, you don't want to be far from anything, especially if you're walking. The hotel's Explorer's restaurant is among the best in town, and the adjoining cocktail bar is a pleasant place for a pre-dinner drink. The restaurant is open every day for breakfast, and for dinner Monday through Saturday.

Grace and Camooweal sts., Mt. Isa, QLD 4825. ✆ **1800/679 178** in Australia, or 07/4743 8000. Fax 07/4743 8424. www.accorhotels.com.au. 56 units, all with bathroom (6 with shower only). A$132–A$184 (US$106–US$147) double. Children under 17 stay free in parent's room. Free cribs. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor pool; nearby golf course; nearby day/night tennis courts; Jacuzzi; tour desk; room service (6.30–9pm); coin-op laundry; laundry service; same-day dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/free movies, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

## THE TOP ATTRACTIONS

**Lawn Hill National Park** Sheer red cliff walls, deep flowing green water, walking tracks, and Aboriginal sites are the features of this Outback oasis. World Heritage–listed Riversleigh is part of Lawn Hill's fossil section. **Campbell's Tours and Travel,** 19 Marian St. (✆ **07/4743 2006;** www.campbellstravel.com.au), has a 3-day tour from Mt. Isa for A$660 (US$528) adults, A$330 (US$264) children. You stay at a permanent camp under the paperbark trees at Gregory River with hot and cold showers and a great swimming and recreation area equipped with canoes. The guided tour takes you to Riversleigh's fossil fields the first day, followed by a full day in the national park bushwalking, visiting Aboriginal rock art, canoeing Lawn Hill Creek, and swimming in the natural spa. On the third day there's a visit to the limestone grottos and time for swimming, canoeing, or fishing before heading back to Mt. Isa. The tour runs most Tuesdays and Fridays from April to October for a minimum of two people.

About 500km (312 miles) northwest of Mt. Isa. For more information, call Queensland Parks & Wildlife Service in Mt. Isa ✆ **07/4743 2055,** or the ranger 07/4748 5572 (3–4pm only).

**Mt. Isa Mine Tours** Campbell's Tours runs a 2-hour tour of the surface of the mine, which takes in open cut mines, shafts, smelters, and workshops. You don't get off the bus, but it is quite interesting anyway.

19 Marian St. ✆ **07/4743 2006.** www.campbellstravel.com.au. Admission A$22 (US$18) adults, A$11 (US$8.80) children, A$55 (US$44) families. Tours run Mon–Sat. Reservations essential.

**Outback at Isa** This new A$12-million (US$9.6-million) tourism complex is the place you will get a real insight into this mining town—and it's the only place where you can get underground on a mine tour. The fully guided Underground Mine Tours descend to the 1.2km (¾ mile) of tunnels in an Alimak cage daily at 10am and 2pm. Wearing protective clothing, including a miner's cap and lamp, you are led by former miners who really know what they are talking about. Tours take about 2½ hours and are not suitable for children under 9. Also part of the complex is the Outback Park, a cool oasis, with a lagoon, lush vegetation, and waterfalls. Other activities include performances at the amphitheater and the experience of eating dinner in the Underground Mine Crib Room. The Discovery Day Tour pass includes the underground tour and gives two days' admission to Riversleigh Fossil Centre (see below), the Isa Experience Gallery, and the Outback Park for A$55 (US$44) adults, A$45 (US$36) seniors, A$33 (US$26) children, and A$150 (US$120) for families of 4.

19 Marian St. ✆ **1300/659 660** in Australia, or 07/4749 1555. www.outbackatisa.com.au. Underground tour A$45 (US$36) adults, A$38 (US$30) seniors, A$26 (US$21) children 9–17, A$120 (US$96) families of 4. Not suitable for children under 9. Daily 8:30am–5pm. Closed Dec 25 and Good Friday.

**Riversleigh Fossil Centre** This interpretive center gives insight into life in the Riversleigh region some 25 million years ago when dinosaurs roamed. The fossil fields have given up some of their secrets, and dioramas re-create some of the ancient animal life, such as *Obdurodon,* an ancestral platypus, and the wonderfully named *Thingadonton.* In the fossil treatment laboratory, you can watch as fossils come to light for the first time in millions of years as a laboratory technician and paleontologist carry out preparatory work on the fossils gathered from the Riversleigh site. Tours to this section are held every day on the hour and include a step-by-step explanation. It's a must-see for visitors to the center.

19 Marian St. ✆ **07/4749 1555.** Fax 07/4743 6296. www.riversleigh.qld.gov.au. Admission A$10 (US$8) adults, A$3 (US$2.40) seniors and children ages 5–17.

**Royal Flying Doctor Base** A 15-minute movie shows "a day in the life" of a flying doctor who covers 1,300 sq. km (500 sq. miles) of northwest Queensland. There's also a small museum, display area, and souvenir shop. Picnic and barbecue facilities are available in the shady gardens.

11 Barkley Hwy. ✆ **07/4743 2800.** www.flyingdoctorqueensland.net. Donation required for admission. Mon–Fri 9:30am–4:30pm. Closed weekends, public holidays, and Queensland school holidays.

# 8

# The Red Centre

*by Marc Llewellyn*

The Red Centre is the landscape many of us conjure up when we think of the Outback—vast horizons, red sand as far as the eye can see, mysterious monoliths, cloudless blue sky, harsh sunlight, and the rhythmic twang of the didgeridoo. It's home to sprawling cattle ranches, ancient mountain ranges, "living fossil" palm trees that survived the Ice Age, cockatoos and kangaroos, red gorges, pretty water holes, and Ayers Rock, now officially called by its Aboriginal name, Uluru.

Aboriginal people have lived here for thousands of years, since long before the Pyramids were a twinkle in a pharaoh's eye, but the Centre is still largely unexplored by non-Aboriginal Australians. One highway cuts from Adelaide in the south to Darwin in the north, and a few roads and four-wheel-drive tracks make a lonely spider web across it; in many areas, non-Aborigines have never set foot.

**Alice Springs** is the only big town in central Australia. So let's get one thing straight—Alice Springs and Uluru are *not* side by side. Uluru is 462km (286 miles) away. You can see it in a day from Alice Springs, but it's an effort.

The Red Centre is more than just the Rock. Give yourself a few days to experience all there is—visiting the impressive Olgas (or Kata Tjuta, its Aboriginal name) near Uluru (Ayers Rock), walking the rim of Kings Canyon, riding a camel down a dry riverbed, poking around Aboriginal rock carvings, swimming in water holes, or staying at an Outback homestead. Alice Springs gives you a better flavor for the Outback than Uluru. If you base yourself there, it's easy to radiate out to less crowded but still beautiful attractions like Palm Valley, Ormiston Gorge, and Trephina Gorge Nature Park, each an easy day trip. Too many visitors jet in, snap a photo of the Rock, and head home, only to miss the essence of the desert.

## 1 Exploring the Red Centre

**VISITOR INFORMATION** The **Central Australian Tourism Industry Association** (see "Visitor Information," under "Alice Springs," below) can send you a brochure pack. It is your best one-stop source of information.

Most of the Red Centre is in the Northern Territory. The **Northern Territory Tourist Commission,** Tourism House, 43 Mitchell St., Darwin, NT 0800 (✆ **13 61 10** in Australia, or 08/8999 3900; www.ntholidays.com), maintains a site for independent travelers at **www.ozoutback.com.au**. The commission publishes a helpful guide to central Australia that details hotels, tour operators, car-rental companies, and attractions, and operates a division that offers package deals on complete trips.

**WHEN TO GO** April, May, September, and October have sunny days (coolish in May, hot in Oct). Winter (June–Aug) means mild temperatures with cold nights.

**Tips Buzz Off!**

Uluru is notorious for plagues of flies in summer. Don't be embarrassed to cover your head with the fly nets sold in souvenir stores—you'll look like the Dreamtime Beekeeper from Outer Space, but there will be "no flies on you, mate," an Aussie way of saying you are doing the right thing.

Summer (Nov–Mar) is ferociously hot and best avoided. In summer, limit exertions to early morning and late afternoon, and choose air-conditioned accommodations. Rain is rare but can come at any time of year.

**DRIVING TIPS** The **Automobile Association of the Northern Territory,** 79–81 Smith St., Darwin, NT 0800 (✆ **08/8981 3837**), offers emergency breakdown service to members of affiliated overseas automobile associations and dispenses maps and advice. It has no office in the Red Centre. For a recorded report of **road conditions,** call ✆ **1800/246 199** in Australia.

Only a handful of highways and arterial roads in the Northern Territory are sealed (paved). A conventional two-wheel-drive car will get you to 95% of what you want to see, but consider renting a four-wheel-drive for complete freedom. Some attractions are on unpaved roads good enough for a two-wheel-drive car, but your car-rental company will not insure a two-wheel-drive for driving on them.

Outside settled areas, the territory has no speed limit, but before you hit the gas, consider the risk of hitting the camels, kangaroos, and other wildlife. Locals stick to a comfortable 120kmph (75 mph) or less. Avoid driving at night, early morning, and late afternoon, when 'roos feed; beware of cattle lying down on the warm bitumen at night. A white road sign bearing a black circle outline crossed by a diagonal black line indicates the point when speed restrictions no longer apply. Make sure you have a full tank of gas before setting out.

Road trains (trucks hauling more than one container) and fatigue caused by driving long distances are two other major threats. For details on safe driving, review the tips in the "By Car" section of "Getting Around Australia" in chapter 2.

If you plan to "go bush" in remote regions not covered by this guide, you may need a permit from the relevant Aboriginal lands council to cross Aboriginal land. This can be a drawn-out bureaucratic affair that takes weeks, so plan ahead. The Northern Territory Tourist Commission (see "Visitor Information," above) can put you in touch with the appropriate council. All good road maps mark Aboriginal lands clearly.

**OTHER TRAVEL TIPS** **Always carry drinking water.** When hiking, carry 4 liters (about a gallon) per person per day in winter, and a liter (¼ gal.) per person per hour in summer. Wear a broad-brimmed hat, sunscreen, and insect repellent.

Bring warm clothing for chilly evenings in winter.

**TOUR OPERATORS** Numerous coach, minicoach, and four-wheel-drive tour operators run tours that take in Alice Springs, Kings Canyon, and Uluru. They depart from Alice Springs or Uluru, offering accommodations ranging from resorts, motels, and basic cabins to shared bunkhouses, tents, or swags (sleeping bags) under the stars. Most pack the highlights into a 2- or 3-day trip, though leisurely trips of 6 days or more are available. Many offer one-way itineraries between Alice and the Rock (via Kings Canyon if you like), or vice versa, which will allow you to avoid backtracking.

AUSTRALIA
Area of Detail
Sydney
Canberra
0 1000 Mi
0 1000 Km
0 50 mi
0 50 km
Haast Bluff Aboriginal Land
Petermann Aboriginal Land
Kings Canyon
Watarrka National Park
Tnorala Conservation Reserve
Gosse Bluff
Mereenie Loop Road
Glen Helen Gorge
West MacDonnell National Park
Ormiston Gorge
Finke River
Hermannsburg
Finke Gorge National Park
Serpentine Gorge
Namatjira Drive
Ellery Creek Big Hole
Simpson's Gap
Standley Chasm
MACDONNELL RANGE
Alice Springs
Trephina Gorge Nature Park
Corroboree Rock
Ross Hwy.
Todd River
Emily Gap
Santa Teresa Aboriginal Land
see Alice Springs map
Stuart Highway
Davenport Cr.
Larapinta Drive
Hugh River
Rainbow Valley Conservation Reserve
Stuarts Well
Finke River
Palmer River
Lurritja Road
Erldunda
Lasseter Highway
Mt. Ebenezer
Curtin Springs
Uluru—Kata Tjuta National Park
Connellan Airport
Ayers Rock Resort
Lasseter Hwy.
Sunset Viewing Area
Park Entrance Station
Uluru/Ayers Rock
Cultural Centre
Kata Tjuta Viewing Area
Kata Tjuta/Mt. Olga
Ayers Rock
Airport
Railway
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Among the reputable companies are **AAT Kings** (✆ 1800/334 009 in Australia, or 03/9274 7422 for the Melbourne central reservations office; www.aatkings.com), which specializes in coach tours but also has four-wheel-drive camping itineraries; **Alice Springs Holidays** (✆ 08/8953 1411; www.alicespringsholidays.com.au), which does upscale soft-adventure tours for groups; **Sahara Outback Tours** (✆ 08/8953 0881; www.saharatours.com.au), which conducts camping safaris in small groups for all ages; and **Discovery Ecotours,** formerly Uluru Experience and Alice Experience (✆ 1800/803 174 in Australia, or 08/8956 2563; www.ecotours.com.au), which specializes in ecotours for groups. **Springs Tour Professionals** (✆ 08/8953 0666; www.alicetourprofessionals.com.au), is a one-stop shop that represents a number of Alice Springs–based tour and sightseeing companies.

**Aboriginal Desert Discovery Tours** (✆ **08/8952 3408;** www.aboriginalart.com.au), owned by Alice Springs Aboriginal people, teams up its Aboriginal guides with Alice-based tour companies to offer tours with an Aboriginal slant. An example is a full-day tour leaving Alice Springs and visiting the MacDonnell Ranges and the Alice Springs Desert Park, where you can see lots of wildlife. There's lots of commentary, a dance performance, and insights into Aboriginal culture. It costs A$165 (US$132) for adults and A$66 (US$53) for kids. Adventurous spirits might want to try a **YHA tour** (Outback Pioneer Hotel & YHA Lodge, Ayers Rock Resort, Ayers Rock, NT 0872; ✆ **1300/139 889** in Australia, or 08/8957 7888; www.yha.com.au) of the Red Centre. An example is the 3-day/2-night Red Centre Adventure tour by four-wheel-drive vehicle. The tour includes some off-road driving and camping, as well a night's dorm accommodations either side of the trip. It costs A$491 (US$393).

## 2 Alice Springs

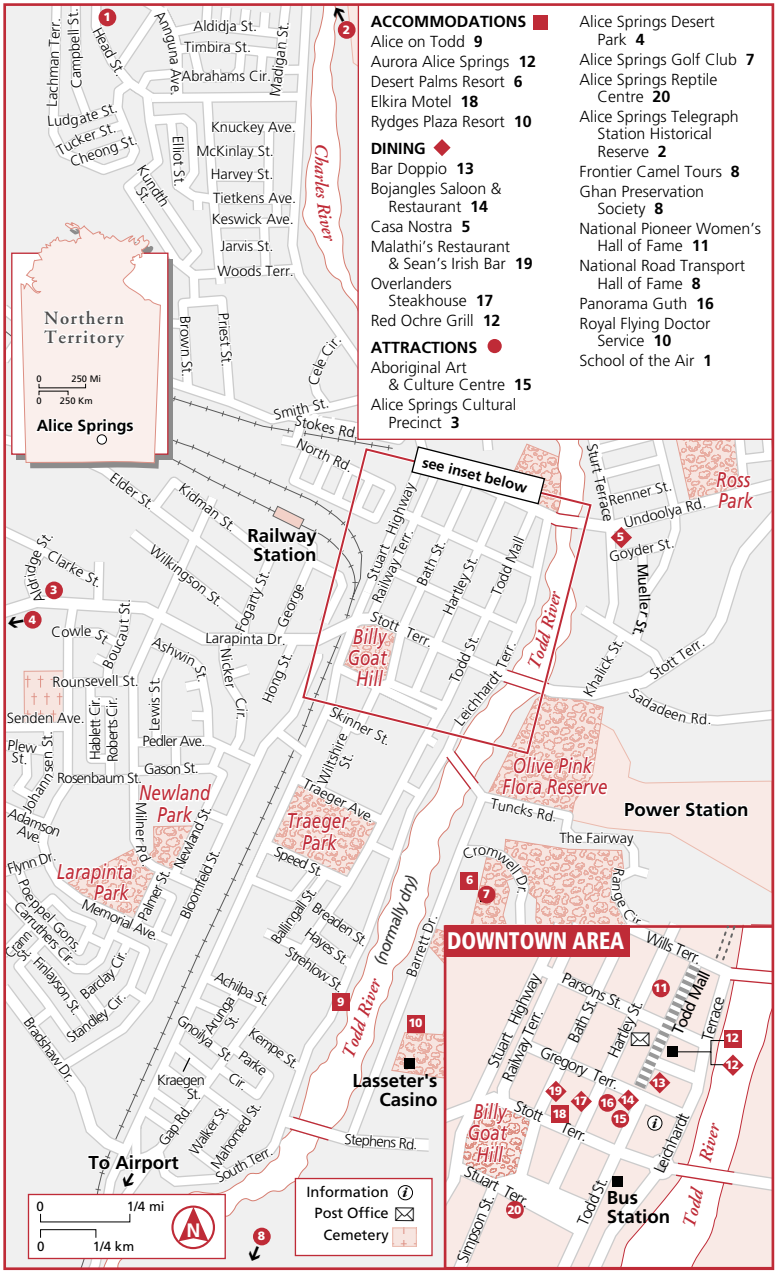
462km (286 miles) NE of Uluru (Ayers Rock); 1,491km (924 miles) S of Darwin; 1,544km (957 miles) N of Adelaide; 2,954km (1,831 miles) NW of Sydney

"The Alice," as Australians fondly dub it, is the unofficial capital of Outback Australia. In the early 1870s, a handful of telegraph-station workers struggled nearly 1,600km (992 miles) north from Adelaide through the desert to settle by a small spring in what must have seemed like the end of the earth. Alice Springs, as the place was called, was just a few huts around a repeater station on the ambitious telegraph line that was to link Adelaide with Darwin and the rest of the world.

Today Alice, as it's also known, is a city of 27,000 people, with supermarkets, banks, and the odd nightclub. It's a friendly, rambling, unsophisticated place. No matter what direction you come from, you will soar for hours over a vast, flat landscape to get here. That's why folks are so surprised when they reach Alice Springs and see low but dramatic mountain ranges, rippling red in the sunshine. Many people excitedly mistake them for Uluru, but that baby is about 462km (286 miles) down the road. The craggy hills close by are the **MacDonnell Ranges.**

Many tourists visit Alice only to get to Uluru, but Alice has charms all its own, albeit mostly of a small-town kind. The red folds of the MacDonnell Ranges hide lovely gorges with shady picnic grounds. A planned 250km (155-mile) hiking trail is partly ready for your boots now. The area has an old gold-rush town to poke around in, quirky little museums, wildlife parks, a couple of cattle stations (ranches) that welcome visitors, a couple of nice day trips, and one of the world's top-10 desert golf courses. You could easily fill 2 or 3 days.

# Alice Springs



This is the heart of the Aboriginal Arrernte people's country, and Alice is a rich source of tours, shops, and galleries for those interested in Aboriginal culture, art, or souvenirs. There is a sad side to this story. Not every Aborigine succeeds in splicing his or her ancient civilization with the 21st century, and the result is dislocated communities living in the riverbed with only alcohol for company.

## ESSENTIALS

**GETTING THERE** **By Plane** **Qantas** (✆ **13 13 13** in Australia, or 800/227-4500 in the U.S. and Canada) flies direct from Sydney, Adelaide, Darwin, Cairns, Broome, and Uluru (Ayers Rock). Flights from most other cities connect via Sydney or Adelaide. **Virgin Blue** (✆ **13 67 80** in Australia, or 07/3295 2296; www.virginblue.com.au) flies to Alice Springs direct from Sydney, with connections from Adelaide, Brisbane, the Gold Coast, and Melbourne. The company offers heavily discounted prices if you book online well in advance. Prices start at around A$199 (US$159) one-way. **Airnorth** (✆ **1800/627 474** in Australia, or 08/8945 2866) does a "Centre Run" from Darwin via Katherine and Tennant Creek Monday through Saturday.

The **Alice Springs Airport Shuttle** (✆ **1800/621 188** in the Northern Territory, or 08/8953 0310) meets all major flights, but not always those from small towns like Tennant Creek. It transfers you to your Alice hotel door for A$10 (US$8) one-way or A$18 (US$14) round-trip. A taxi from the airport to town, a distance of 15km (9⅓ miles), is around A$25 (US$20).

**By Train** The ***Ghan*** train, named after Afghan camel-train drivers who carried supplies in the Red Centre during the 19th century, makes the trip from Adelaide to Alice every week, continuing to Darwin. The twice-weekly Adelaide-Alice service (leaving Adelaide at 5:15pm on Wed and Fri) takes roughly 24 hours. The route is often treeless and empty, if fascinatingly so; don't be concerned that you'll miss it by overnighting on the train. The train has sleeper berths. For fares and schedules, contact **Great Southern Railway** (✆ **13 21 47** in Australia, or 08/8213 4592; www.gsr.com.au) or see "Getting Around Australia" in chapter 2 for its booking agencies abroad.

**By Bus** **Greyhound** (✆ **13 14 99** in Australia, or 07/4690 9950; www.greyhound.com.au) runs from Adelaide and Darwin. It's a 21-hour trip from Adelaide, and the fare is around A$180 (US$144). The 21-hour trip from Darwin costs about A$195 (US$156). The 36-hour trip from Cairns costs A$360 (US$288). A daily 5¾-hour run connects with Uluru (Ayers Rock); the fare is around A$75 (US$60).

**By Car** Alice Springs is on the Stuart Highway linking Adelaide and Darwin. Allow a very long 2 days or a more comfortable 3 days to drive from Adelaide, the same from Darwin. From Sydney, connect to the Stuart Highway via Broken Hill and Port Augusta north of Adelaide; from Cairns, head south to Townsville, then west via the town of Mt. Isa to join the Stuart Highway at Tennant Creek. Both routes are long and dull. From Perth it is an even longer, duller drive across the Nullarbor Plain to connect with the Stuart Highway at Port Augusta. If you fancy a driving holiday of

### *Tips* Safety in the Centre

Alice is a safe place, but steer clear of dark streets and the riverbed at night, when some teenagers can make a nuisance of themselves.

the area, with rental car and accommodations included, then check out www.nt holidays.com. An example is a 6-day trip from Alice to Uluru/Ayers Rock, the Olgas, Kings Canyon, and then back to Alice Springs for A$952 (US$762).

**VISITOR INFORMATION** The **Central Australian Tourism Industry Association (CATIA) Visitor Information Centre,** 60 Gregory Terrace, Alice Springs, NT 0870 (✆ **08/8952 5800;** www.centralaustraliantourism.com), is the official one-stop shop for bookings and touring information for the Red Centre, including Alice Springs, Kings Canyon, and Uluru–Kata Tjuta National Park (Ayers Rock). It also acts as the visitor center for the **Parks and Wildlife Commission of the Northern Territory** (✆ **08/8951 8211;** www.nt.gov.au/ipe/pwcnt). It's open Monday through Friday from 8:30am to 5:30pm and weekends and public holidays from 9am to 4pm. It also has a desk at the airport.

**SPECIAL EVENTS** The town hosts a couple of bizarre events. The **Camel Cup** camel race takes place on the second Saturday in July. In late September, folks from hundreds of miles around come out to cheer the **Henley-on-Todd Regatta** ★, during which gaudily decorated, homemade bottomless "boats" race down the dry Todd River bed. Well, what else do you do on a river that flows only 3 days a year? See "Australia Calendar of Events" in chapter 2 for more details on this event.

**GETTING AROUND** Virtually all tours pick you up at your hotel.

If your itinerary traverses unpaved roads, as it may in outlying areas, you will need to rent a four-wheel-drive vehicle because regular cars will not be insured on an unpaved surface. However, a regular car will get you to most attractions. **Avis** (✆ 08/8953 5533), **Budget** (✆ 08/8952 8899), **EuropCar** (✆ 08/8955 5994), **Hertz** (✆ 08/8952 2644), local company **Outback Auto Rentals** (✆ 1800/652 133 in Australia, or 08/8953 5333), and **Thrifty** (✆ 08/8952 9999) all rent conventional and four-wheel-drive vehicles. You may get a better deal on car rental by going through the **Outback Travel Shop** (✆ 08/8955 5288; www.outbacktravelshop.com.au) in Alice Springs, a booking agent that negotiates bulk rates with most Alice car-rental companies.

Hertz, Thrifty, and Outback Auto Rentals rent **camping kits** holding everything you need, including a tent, sleeping bags, and a gas stove. A kit usually costs around A$385 (US$308) for two people for 5 days. Book it in advance. Carrying camping gear, as well as your luggage, probably means you have to hire a larger car, too!

Many rental outfits for motor homes (camper vans) have Alice offices. They include **Britz Campervan Rentals** (✆ 08/8952 8814), **Hertz Campervans** (✆ 08/8953 5333), **Kea Camper (Australia)** (✆ 1800/252 555), and **Maui Rentals** (✆ 08/8952 8049). As an example of price, another outfitter, **Apollo Campers** (✆ 1800/777 779 in Australia; www.apollocamper.com), rents two- to three-berth vans for around A$100 (US$80) a day, with pickup and drop-off at several major centers. A four-wheel-drive version costs A$165 (US$132) to A$220 (US$176) a day. This can work out to be significantly cheaper than staying in hotels and going on tours.

The best way to get around town without your own transport is aboard the **Alice Wanderer Centre Sightseeing** bus (see "Organized Tours," later in this chapter). Taxi fares are exorbitant, presumably because there's only one main outfit in town, **Alice Springs Taxis** (✆ **13 10 08**).

**CITY LAYOUT** **Todd Mall** is the heart of town. Most shops, businesses, and restaurants are here or within a few blocks' walk. Most hotels, the casino, the golf

course, and many of the town's attractions are a few kilometers outside of town. The dry Todd River "flows" through the city east of Todd Mall.

## ACCOMMODATIONS YOU CAN AFFORD

You may pay lower rates than those listed in the summer during the off season (Dec–Mar), and even as late as June. Peak season typically runs from July through October or November.

Besides the more upmarket properties below, there are several backpacker resorts offering dorm rooms and doubles. One of the best is **Annie's Place,** 4 Traegar Ave., Alice Springs, NT 0870 (✆ **1800/359 089** in Australia, or 08/8952 1545; www.anniesplace.com.au). Doubles cost between A$50 (US$40) for a room with shared bathroom and A$60 (US$48) for one with your own. Another option is the **Alice Springs Pioneer YHA Hostel,** at the corner of Parsons St. and Leichardt Terrace, Alice Springs, NT 0870 (✆ **08/8952 8855;** www.yha.com.au). Dorm beds cost A$19 to A$23 (US$15–US$18), the four double rooms cost A$54 (US$43), and the two family rooms cost A$80 (US$64) each.

**Alice on Todd** ★ *Kids* A new addition to the Alice accommodations scene, Alice on Todd, has nice one- and two-bedroom apartments. It's a very good option, particularly if you have kids (if they're under 4, they stay free). The hotel overlooks the Todd River and is just a short stroll from town. The two luxury two-bedroom apartments each have an extra sofa bed.

Strehlow St. and South Terrace (P.O. Box 8454), Alice Springs, NT 0870. ✆ **08/8953 8033.** www.aliceontodd.com. 34 units. A$98 (US$78) studio apt; A$120 (US$96) 1-bedroom apt; A$150 (US$120) 2-bedroom apt; A$160 (US$128) luxury 2-bedroom apt. Extra person A$20 (US$16). AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Outdoor pool; game room. *In room:* A/C, TV, kitchenette, fridge, coffeemaker, iron, washing machine.

**Aurora Alice Springs** This pleasant hotel (formally the Territory Inn) is smack in the center of town. Rooms in the newer wing are standard motel-style lodgings, all large and decorated nicely. Those in the original wing are small and a little dark; they have a pretty heritage theme, with floral bedcovers and lace curtains. One suite has a Jacuzzi. The courtyard has a barbecue, and the front desk loans hair dryers. The tiny pool and Jacuzzi are tucked away in a utilitarian corner, so this is not the place for chilling out poolside; stay here to be within walking distance of shops and restaurants.

Leichhardt Terrace (backing onto Todd Mall), Alice Springs, NT 0870. ✆ **1800/089 644** in Australia, or 08/8950 6666. Fax 08/8952 7829. www.aurora-resorts.com.au. 108 units (all with shower only). A$150–A$170 (US$120–US$136) double. Extra person A$20 (US$16). Children under 14 stay free in parent's room with existing bedding. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. Hotel provides transfers from airport for A$11 (US$8.80) per person one-way; also picks up from train. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Red Ochre Grill; see "Where to Dine," below); small heated outdoor pool; Jacuzzi; tour desk; airport shuttle; limited room service; babysitting; laundry; same-day dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, minibar, fridge, iron.

**Best Western Elkira Motel** The cheapest rooms in the heart of town—decent ones, that is—are at this unpretentious motel. Standard rooms are dated, with lots of wood and tile floors, and a fridge and shower. Two standard family rooms come with a double bed and three singles. The 42 deluxe rooms have a little more space; nine have microwaves, and some have queen-size beds. Nine family rooms are nicer still and come with a kitchenette. They cost the same as normal deluxe rooms and are worth asking for even if you're traveling as a couple. All deluxe family rooms and a few deluxe doubles have bathrooms. The seven budget rooms are a little dated, and though small, are comfortable and quiet. They come with a double bed, TV, shower, fridge,

and hair dryer. Two units have Jacuzzis. Ask for a room away from the road because the traffic is noisy during the day. Look out for the friendly Doberman called Charlie.

65 Bath St. (opposite Kmart), Alice Springs, NT 0870. ✆ **1800/809 252** in Australia, or 08/8952 1222. Fax 08/8953 1370. www.elkira.com.au. 58 units (some with shower only). A$110–A$140 (US$88–US$112) double or family room. Extra person A$15 (US$12); extra child under 3 A$5 (US$4). AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; unheated outdoor pool; nearby golf course; Jacuzzi; tour desk; car-rental desk; airport shuttle; limited room service; laundry service; same-day dry-cleaning; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, fax, dataport, kitchenette (in some), fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron, safe.

**Desert Palms Resort** ★ *Value* Next to Lasseter's Casino (where the food can be awful) and the Alice Springs Golf Club (where guests have honorary membership), these cheery cabins behind palms and pink bougainvillea are one of the nicest places to stay in Alice. Don't be deterred by their poky prefab appearance; inside they are surprisingly large, well kept, and inviting, with a pine-pitched ceiling, a kitchenette, a sliver of bathroom sporting white tiles and fittings, and a pert furnished front deck. Four rooms are suitable for travelers with disabilities. A sun deck and pool with its own little island is out front. The pleasant staff at the front desk loans hair dryers, processes film, does laundry, sells basic grocery and liquor supplies, and books tours.

74 Barrett Dr. (1km/½ mile from town), Alice Springs, NT 0870. ✆ **1800/678 037** in Australia, or 08/8952 5977. Fax 08/8953 4176. www.desertpalms.com.au. 80 units (all with shower only). A$115 (US$92) double; A$130 (US$104) triple; A$140 (US$112) quad. Extra person A$10 (US$8). AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Large unheated outdoor pool; golf course nearby; half-size tennis court; access to nearby health club; tour desk; car-rental desk; free coach station/train station/airport shuttle twice daily; free resort-to-town shuttle 4 times daily; massage; laundry service; same-day dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, kitchenette, fridge, coffeemaker.

## WORTH A SPLURGE

**Rydges Plaza Resort Alice Springs** ★ *Value* Next to the golf club and near Lasseter's Casino, this is one of Alice's fanciest resorts. Three stories of rooms wrap around the pool and an ample sun deck. All rooms are spacious. Each has a balcony—some look onto the pool, some toward town, some out to the red ranges. Barbecues take place around the pool at lunch and dinner from September through March.

Barrett Dr. (1.5km/1 mile from town center), Alice Springs, NT 0870. ✆ **1800/226 466** in Australia, or 0800/446 187 in New Zealand (Rydges Resorts); resort direct 1800/675 212 in Australia, or 08/8950 8000. Fax 08/8953 0475. www.rydges.com. 235 units. A$160–A$215 (US$128–US$172) double; A$350–A$500 (US$280–US$400) suite. Extra person A$25 (US$20). Children under 13 stay free in parent's room with existing bedding. Free cribs. Ask about packages. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; heated outdoor pool; 2 lit tennis courts; exercise room w/plunge pool; Jacuzzi; sauna; bike rental; tour desk; airport shuttle; secretarial services; 24-hr. room service; babysitting; laundry service; same-day dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, dataport, minibar, hair dryer, iron.

## WHERE TO DINE

**Bar Doppio** ★ EAST/WEST CAFE FARE If you're in need of a dose of cool—style, as well as air-conditioning—this arcade cafe is the place to chill over good coffee and feast on cheap, wholesome food. Sacks of coffee beans are stacked all over, Gypsy music plays, no tables and chairs match, and the staff doesn't care if you sit here all day. It's largely vegetarian, but fish and meat figure on the blackboard menu. Try lamb *chermoula* cutlets on Gabriella potatoes with rocket, red onion, and tomato salad; chickpea curry; warm Turkish flatbread with dips; or spuds with hot toppings. Hot and cold breakfast choices stay on the menu until 11am. Takeout is available. It's BYOB.

2–3 Fan Arcade (off the southern end of Todd Mall). ✆ **08/8952 6525.** Main courses A$7–A$16 (US$5.60–US$13); sandwiches average A$6 (US$4.80). No credit cards. Mon–Fri 7:30am–5:30pm; Sat 7:30am–4:30pm; Sun 10am–4:30pm; Fri–Sat 6–9pm. Closed holidays and Dec 25–Jan 1.

**Bojangles Saloon and Restaurant** ★ BURGERS/STEAKS/MODERN AUSTRALIAN Swing open the saloon doors and enter a world of cowhide seats, thick wooden tables, Western-style knickknacks, original American Civil War guns, and so on. The front bar is friendly and serves good beers by the bottle or schooner, and food such as burgers, nachos, salads, and fish and chips. The restaurant out back has more gourmet offerings, but either way it's a great atmosphere. Aussie-style country and folk singers strum away in the evenings, and the bar staff is terrific.

80 Todd St. ✆ **08/8952 2873.** Main courses A$7–A$18 (US$5.60–US$15) front bar, A$12–A$25 (US$9.60–US$20) restaurant. AE, DC, MC, V. Daily noon–3pm and 6–10pm.

**Casa Nostra** ★★ *Value* ITALIAN The only difference between this cheery homespun family eatery and every other Italian restaurant in the world is that this one has autographed photos of Tom Selleck pinned to the wall. Judging by his scrawled praise, Tom loved eating here (when on location in Alice filming *Quigley Down Under*) as much as the locals do. You've seen the red-checked tablecloths and the basket-clad Chianti bottles before, but the food is surprisingly good. A long list of pastas (including masterful carbonara), pizzas, and chicken and veal dishes are the main offerings. All meals are available to take out. BYO.

Corner of Undoolya Rd. and Sturt Terrace. ✆ **08/8952 0549.** Reservations recommended. Main courses A$11–A$18 (US$8.80–US$15). MC, V. Mon–Sat 5–10pm. Closed Dec 25–Jan.

**Malathi's Restaurant & Sean's Irish Bar** ASIAN/WESTERN In an unprepossessing building a couple of blocks from Todd Mall, Malathi's serves an eclectic assortment of Asian dishes plus a few Aussie choices, such as grain-fed steak. The Asian food is outstanding. I can recommend lamb *korma,* a kind of mild curry. You might want to try Lakshmi king prawns cooked in Indian flavors or Thai coconut curry. Vegetarians have some good choices. Takeout is available, too. The bar serves Irish stews and Guinness, and live bands play (sometimes). The restaurant has a wine list, and you can bring your own wine, subject to a A$5 (US$4) corkage fee per bottle.

51 Bath St. (opposite Kmart). ✆ **08/8952 1858.** Reservations recommended. Main courses A$15–A$28 (US$12–US$22); many dishes under A$21 (US$17). AE, DC, MC, V. Restaurant Mon–Sat 5:30–10pm or later; bar daily 3:30–9:30pm.

**Red Ochre Grill** ★ GOURMET BUSH TUCKER If you've never tried wallaby mignons on a bed of native pasta and polenta cake with native berry and red-wine cream sauce, or barramundi (fish) baked in paperbark with wild lime and coriander butter, here's your chance. The chef at this upscale chain fuses native Aussie ingredients with dishes from around the world. Although it might seem a touristy formula, the food is mouthwatering. Dine in the contemporary interior fronting Todd Mall or outside in the attractive courtyard.

Todd Mall. ✆ **08/8950 6666.** Reservations recommended at dinner. Main courses A$9–A$21 (US$7.20–US$17) lunch, A$15–A$23 (US$12–US$18) dinner; A$13–A$16 (US$10–US$13) buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 6:30am–10pm.

### WORTH A SPLURGE

**Overlanders Steakhouse** ★ STEAK/AUSSIE TUCKER This landmark on the Alice dining scene is famous for its "Drover's Blowout" menu, which assaults the mega-hungry with soup and damper, then a platter of crocodile *vol-au-vents,* camel and kangaroo filet, and emu medallions—these are just the *appetizers*—followed by Scotch filet or barramundi (freshwater fish), and dessert. There's a regular menu with a 700-gram (1-lb. 10-oz.) steak, plus lots of lighter fare like oysters and spinach crepes.

The barnlike interior is Outback all through, from the rustic bar to the saddlebags hanging from the roof beams. An "Overlanders' Table" seats solo diners together.

72 Hartley St. ✆ **08/8952 2159.** Reservations required in peak season. Main courses A$23–A$35 (US$18–US$28); Drover's Blowout A$44 (US$35). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 6–10pm.

## SEEING THE SIGHTS IN ALICE

**Aboriginal Art & Culture Centre** Set up by the Southern Arrernte Aboriginal people, this center houses a small, intriguing museum with exhibits on Aboriginal life. It displays a timeline of the Aboriginal view of history since "contact" (the arrival of Europeans). It sells artifacts and art. Allow 15 to 60 minutes.

86 Todd St. ✆ **08/8952 3408.** Free admission. Daily 8am–5pm.

**Alice Springs Cultural Precinct** At least one or two of the attractions here will probably pique your interest. All of them are within walking distance of each other. The **Museum of Central Australia** focuses on local fossils, natural history displays, and meteorites. Some impressive Aboriginal and contemporary Aussie art is on display at the **Araluen Centre** (box office ✆ **08/8951 1122**), the town's performing arts hub; check out the "Honey Ant Dreaming" stained-glass window in its foyer. Aviation nuts may want to browse the old radios, aircraft, and wreckage in the **Aviation Museum,** which preserves the territory's aerial history. You can buy stylish crafts and sometimes catch artists at work in the **Territory Craft** gallery. You may want to amble among the outdoor sculptures, including the 15m (49-ft.) *Yeperenye Dreamtime Caterpillar,* or among the gravestones in the **Memorial Cemetery,** where "Afghani" camel herders (from what is now Pakistan) are buried facing Mecca. To reach the precinct, take a cab, or the **Alice Wanderer Centre Sightseeing** bus (see "Organized Tours," below). There is a picnic area, but save your meal for the Alice Springs Telegraph Station Historical Reserve (below).

Larapinta Dr. (at Memorial Ave.), (2km/1¼ miles south of town). ✆ **08/8951 1120.** Admission (includes Museum of Central Australia, Araluen Centre, Central Australian Aviation Museum, Territory Craft, and Memorial Cemetery) A$8 (US$6.40) adults; A$5 (US$4) seniors, students, and children 5–16; A$20 (US$16) families. Daily 10am–5pm. Closed Good Friday and Dec 25.

**Alice Springs Desert Park** ★ By means of an easy 1.6km (1-mile) trail through three reconstructed natural habitats, this wildlife and flora park shows you 120 or so of the animal species that live in the desert around Alice (including kangaroos you can walk among). Most of the creatures are small mammals (like the big-eared bilby), reptiles (cute thorny devil lizards), and birds. Don't miss the **Birds of Prey** ★★ show held daily at 10am or 3:30pm. There's a cafe, too. Allow 2 to 3 hours. The **Alice Wanderer Centre Sightseeing** bus (✆ **1800/722 111** in Australia, or 08/8952 2111; www.alicewanderer.com.au) offers a day trip to the park in combination with a one-day town tour (see "Organized Tours," below). The 2-day package costs A$68 (US$54) for adults and A$54 (US$43) for children, and includes park admission fee.

Larapinta Dr. (6km/3¾ miles west of town). ✆ **08/8951 8788.** www.alicespringsdesertpark.com.au. Admission A$18 (US$14) adults, A$9 (US$7.20) students and children 5–16, A$40 (US$32) families. Daily 7:30am–6pm (last suggested entry 4pm; 'roo and emu exhibit closes 4:30pm). Closed Dec 25.

**Alice Springs Reptile Centre** *Kids* Kids can walk around with pythons or bearded dragons (lizards) on their shoulders all day if they want, at this Aussie reptile park. The proprietor lifts up the cages' glass fronts for better photos and lets kids hand-feed bugs to the animals at feeding time. Some 30 species are on display, including the world's deadliest snake—Australia's inland taipan—and big goannas. Allow an hour.

9 Stuart Terrace (opposite the Royal Flying Doctor Service). ✆ **08/8952 8900.** Admission A$7 (US$5.60) adults, A$4 (US$3.20) children under 17, A$20 (US$16) families. Daily 9am–5pm. Closed Jan 1 and Dec 25.

**Alice Springs School of the Air** Sitting in on school lessons may not be your idea of a vacation, but this school is different—it broadcasts by radio to a 1,300,000-sq.-km (507,000-sq.-mile) "schoolroom" of 140 children on Outback stations. That's as big as Germany, Great Britain, Ireland, New Zealand, and Japan combined—or twice the size of Texas. Visitors watch and listen in when classes are in session; outside class hours, you may hear taped classes. You can browse the kids' artwork, photos, video, and other displays in the visitor gallery. Free 30-minute tours run throughout the day.

80 Head St. (2.5km/1½ miles from town). ✆ **08/8951 6834.** www.assoa.nt.edu.au. Admission A$3.50 (US$2.80) adults, A$2.50 (US$2) children 5–16, A$12 (US$9.60) families. Mon–Sat and public holidays 8:30am–4:30pm; Sun 1:30–4:30pm. Closed Jan 1 and Dec 25–26. Bus: 3 or Alice Wanderer (see "Organized Tours," below).

**Alice Springs Telegraph Station Historical Reserve** ★ *Finds* Alice Springs began life in 1871 as this charming telegraph repeater station, set by a pretty water hole amid red bouldery hills, sprawling gums full of parrots, and mercifully green lawns. An oasis in the harsh Alice landscape, it's a place tourists often overlook. Arm yourself with the free map or join a free 45-minute tour. You can wander around the old stationmaster's residence; the telegraph office, with its Morse code machine tap-tapping away; the shoeing yard packed with blacksmith's equipment; and the stables, housing vintage buggies and saddlery. From the on-site computer, you can "telegraph" e-mails to your friends. May through October, "kitchen maids" in period dress serve scones (biscuits) and damper (campfire bread) from the original wood-fired ovens. The park has pet camels and sometimes orphaned kangaroo joeys. Allow a good hour, more to walk one of the several hiking trails leading from the extensive grounds. This is a lovely picnic spot. There is a gift shop and coffee and snacks for sale, too. To get there, take a cab or **Alice Wanderer Centre Sightseeing** bus (see "Organized Tours," below) or the 4km (2½-mile) riverside pedestrian/bike track that starts near the corner of Wills Terrace and Undoolya Road.

Stuart Hwy., 4km (2½ miles) north of town (beyond the School of the Air turnoff). ✆ **08/8952 3993.** Free admission to picnic grounds and trails; station A$6.50 (US$5.20) adults, A$3.50 (US$2.80) children 5–15. Daily 8am–5pm (picnic grounds and trails until 9pm). Station closed Dec 25.

**Royal Flying Doctor Service** Alice is a major base for this airborne medical service that treats people living and traveling in the vast Outback. An interesting 20-minute tour runs every half-hour, featuring a video and a talk in the communications room; allow another 30 minutes or so to browse the small museum. Some of the recorded conversations between doctors and patients are intriguing. There is a nice garden cafe and a gift shop.

8–10 Stuart Terrace (at end of Hartley St.). ✆ **08/8952 1129.** www.flyingdoctor.net. Admission A$6 (US$4.80) adults, A$2.50 (US$2) children 6–15. Mon–Sat 9am–5pm (last tour 4pm); Sun and public holidays 1–5pm. Closed Jan 1 and Dec 25.

## ORGANIZED TOURS

**AROUND TOWN & OUT IN THE DESERT** The **Alice Wanderer Centre Sightseeing** bus (✆ **1800/722 111** in Australia, or 08/8952 2111; www.alicewanderer.com.au) does a running loop of town attractions every 70 minutes starting at 9am, with the last departure at 4pm. Hop on and off as you please and enjoy the commentary from the driver. The bus departs daily from the south end of Todd Mall. Tickets are sold on board and cost A$38 (US$30) for adults and A$30 (US$24) for

kids 4 to 14. Call for free pickup from your hotel. The company also runs full-day tours to outlying areas, including to the West MacDonnell Ranges (daily except Tues), for A$110 (US$88) for adults and A$88 (US$70) for kids; to Bond Springs cattle Station, Monday to Friday, costing A$105 (US$84) for adults and A$88 (US$70) for kids; and to Santa Teresa Aboriginal Community, on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays. Here you can meet local Aborigines and view—and purchase—their artwork. This tour costs A$130 (US$104) for adults and A$104 (US$83) for kids.

The bus calls at most of the attractions above, plus the **Old Ghan Museum & Road Transport Hall of Fame,** housing the original Ghan train that plied the Adelaide–Alice Springs line from 1929 to 1980; and **Panorama Guth,** an art gallery housing a 360-degree painting of central Australian landscapes by artist Henk Guth.

The company also runs other tours around the area, including a trip out to the rocky West MacDonnell Ranges. It's well worth checking out the Alice Wanderer website to help you plan your time before you visit.

Many Alice-based companies offer minicoach or four-wheel-drive day trips and extended tours of Alice and of outlying areas including the East and West Macs, Hermannsburg, and Finke Gorge National Park. Among the well-regarded ones are: **Discovery Ecotours** (✆ **08/8956 2563;** www.ecotours.com.au); **Alice Springs Holidays** (✆ **1800/801 401** in Australia, or 08/8953 1411; www.alicespringsholidays.com.au); and **Alice Springs Tour Professionals** (✆ **1800/673 391** in Australia, or 08/8953 0666; www.alicetourprofessionals.com.au), which books a number of reliable tour operators and adventure outfitters. See "Exploring the Red Centre," earlier in this chapter, for more information.

Several companies run tours by motorcycle or four-wheel-drive ATV (all-terrain vehicle). One option is **Central Oz Tours** (✆ **08/8953 4755;** http://centraloz.biz).

**ABORIGINAL TOURS** I recommend a visit to the **Aboriginal Art & Culture Centre** (6 Todd St.; www.aboriginalart.com.au). The **half-day tour** ★ features an explanation of the Dreamtime creation era, a gentle bush tucker walk, a chance to throw a boomerang and spear, talks about tools and weapons over billy tea and damper, and a dance performance at which you can have a go yourself and have your photo taken with the dancers. You may have seen the dancers performing in the opening ceremony of the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games. Threaded through all this is an ongoing discussion of Aboriginal culture, beliefs, family relationships, and a view of history both ancient and modern through Aboriginal eyes. You also have a chance to buy art. The experience wraps up with a didgeridoo lesson at 1pm. The tour departs daily at 8am and costs A$83 (US$66) for adults and A$44 (US$35) for children under 12, including hotel pickup. The center also organizes an Aboriginal Cultural Performance, with lots of dancing, atmosphere, and twinkling stars. Dinner includes kangaroo and barramundi. The performance, with dinner and wine, costs A$79 (US$63) for adults and A$30 (US$24) for kids.

An interesting activity at the center is learning to play the didgeridoo at the "Didgeridoo University." A 1-hour session costs A$12 (US$9.60) for adults and A$5.50 (US$4.40) for kids.

**CAMEL SAFARIS** You might not associate camels with Australia, but the camel's ability to get by without water was key to opening the arid inland parts of the country to European settlement in the 1800s. With the advent of cars, they were released into the wild, and today more than 200,000 roam central Australia. Australia even exports them to the Middle East! **Frontier Camel Tours** (✆ **1800/806 499** in Australia, or

### *Moments* Billy Tea & Damper

Any tour in the Outback isn't complete without the traditional bushman's meal of billy tea and damper. Billy tea is made from tea leaves and sometimes eucalyptus leaves, put into water (traditionally from a water hole or river) and boiled in an open-topped canister on an open fire. You don't have to stir it; the trick is to pick up the canister by the wire handle and swing the whole thing around, sometimes over your head—centrifugal force keeps the liquid in (don't try this at home, though). Damper is simply flour, water, and salt mixed into dough and thrown in the ashes of the fire to cook into bread. Yummy.

08/8953 0444; www.cameltours.com.au) runs short camel rides daily costing A$10 (US$8) for adults and A$6 (US$4.80) for kids. A 1-hour sunset tour with dinner at the company's camel farm, where you can browse its camel museum and shop, costs A$105 (US$84) for adults and A$75 (US$60) for kids 5 to 12, including hotel transfers. It departs daily at 4pm April through October and at 5pm November through March, and it gets back around 5½ hours later. Kids under 5 can join the ride if the cameleer on duty agrees. A breakfast ride, leaving at 6:30am and returning at 9:30am, costs A$80 (US$64) for adults and A$45 (US$36) for children. The company also runs camel tours near Uluru (Ayers Rock).

**HOT-AIR BALLOON FLIGHTS** Dawn balloon flights above the desert are popular in central Australia. You have to get up 90 minutes before dawn, though. Several companies offer flights. **Outback Ballooning** (✆ **1800/809 790** in Australia, or 08/8952 8723; www.outbackballooning.com.au) is one of the most upscale. A 1-hour flight followed by champagne breakfast in the bush costs A$300 (US$240) per person, with a 20% discount for kids under 17. A 30-minute breakfast flight costs A$200 (US$160). Kids under 6 are discouraged from participating because they cannot see over the basket. Don't make any other morning plans—you probably won't get back to your hotel until close to noon.

## ACTIVE PURSUITS

**BIKING** A gently undulating 17km (11-mile) **bike trail** weaves from John Flynn's Grave on Larapinta Drive, 7km (4⅓ miles) west of town, through the bush and desert foothills of the MacDonnell Ranges to Simpson's Gap (p. 390). **Centre Cycles,** Lindsay Avenue at Undoolya Road (✆ **08/8953 2966**), rents bikes for around A$10 (US$8) for 4 hours (plus a refundable A$50/US$40 deposit). ***Note:*** Carry water because the two taps en route are a long way apart. Bike in cooler months only.

**BUSHWALKING** The 250km (155-mile) **Larapinta Trail** winds west from Alice through the sparse red ranges, picturesque semidesert scenery, and rich bird life of the West MacDonnell National Park (p. 390). Sections range from easy to hard. The shortest is 8km (5 miles), ranging up to several 23- to 29km- (14–18-mile) stretches. The **Parks and Wildlife Commission of the Northern Territory** office in the Tom Hare Building of the Arid Zone Research Institute, Stuart Highway, in Alice Springs (✆ **08/8951 8211;** www.nt.gov.au/ipe/pwcnt) and the **CATIA Visitor Information Centre** (see "Visitor Information," earlier in this chapter) dispense trail maps and information. Camp facilities are simple at best on popular routes, nonexistent on less

traveled sections. ***Warning:*** Always carry drinking water. The trail may close in extremely hot summer periods.

**Alice Wanderer Centre Sightseeing Tours** (✆ **1800/66 9111** in Australia, or 08/8952 2111; www.alicewanderer.com.au) runs to road access points along the trail, where you can mostly pick up a choice of 1-, 2-, or 3-day hikes. Several outfitters run guided, supported hikes along trail sections.

**GOLF** The **Alice Springs Golf Club** ★, 1km (just over ½ mile) from town on Cromwell Drive (✆ **08/8952 5440**), boasts a Thomson-Wolveridge course rated among the world's top desert courses by touring pros. The course is open from sunup to sundown. Nine holes cost A$20 (US$16); 18 holes, A$30 (US$24). Club rental costs A$25 (US$20), and a cart, which many locals don't bother with, goes for A$30 (US$24). It's best to reserve a tee time.

## SHOPPING AT THE SOURCE FOR ABORIGINAL ART

Alice Springs is the best place in Australia to buy **Aboriginal art and crafts** ★. You will find no shortage of stuff: linen and canvas paintings, didgeridoos, spears, clapping sticks, *coolamons* (a dish used by women to carry anything from water to babies), animal carvings, baskets, and jewelry, as well as books, CDs, and all kinds of non-Aboriginal merchandise printed with Aboriginal designs. Prices can soar into the thousands for large canvases by world-renowned painters, but you will find plenty of small works for under A$250 (US$200). Major artworks sell unmounted for ease of shipment, which most galleries arrange. Store hours can vary with the seasons and the crowds, so it pays to check ahead.

See artists at work when you drop by **Jukurrpa Artists,** Stott Terrace between Gap Road and Leichhardt Terrace (✆ **08/8953 1052**). This Aboriginal women's cooperative studio and gallery sells the "pattern and dot" paintings of the Western Desert style, plus crafts such as carvings and jewelry, weapons, and tools.

Aboriginal-owned **Warumpi Arts,** 105 Gregory Terrace (✆ **08/8952 9066**), sells wooden artifacts, seed necklaces, and canvas and linen paintings in the earth-hued designs of the Papunya people, who live 250km (155 miles) west of Alice. Another Aboriginal-owned gallery, **Papunya Tula Artists,** 78 Todd St. (✆ **08/8952 4731**), sells paintings on canvas and linen from Papunya and other artists living in the desert as far as 700km (434 miles) west of Alice Springs.

Several stores on Todd Mall sell affordable Aboriginal art and souvenirs. The biggest, the **Original Dreamtime Gallery,** 63 Todd Mall (✆ **08/8952 8861**), stocks a huge selection and packs, mails (anywhere in the world), and insures your purchases free of charge. It also shows visiting exhibitions of Aboriginal art.

**Arunta Art Gallery & Bookshop,** 70 Todd St. (✆ **08/8952 1544**), stocks a great range of books on Aboriginal art, language, and archaeology, as well as Australian history, geology, wildlife, and biographies.

If you're interested in investing in serious artwork, speak to Roslyn Premont, proprietor of **Gallery Gondwana,** 43 Todd Mall (✆ **08/8953 1577**). She has written a book on desert art, and her gallery sells only top-notch works.

A big range of art, didgeridoos, artifacts, music, and books is on sale at the **Aboriginal Art & Culture Centre,** 86 Todd St. (✆ **08/8952 3408**).

Today's Aboriginal bands mix ancient and hip new rhythms to create some wonderful sounds. For the country's biggest range of indigenous music, head to the **CAAMA** (Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association) ★ store at 101 Todd St. (✆ **08/8952 9207**). It also stocks books on Aboriginal art and issues; videos in PAL

and NTSC format (on everything from how to fix your broken-down Ford the bushman's way to Aboriginal people's memories of their first contact with "white man"); children's books with Aboriginal story lines; a line of Aboriginal-print fabrics, clothes, diaries, stationery, and greeting cards; Aboriginal artifacts and jewelry; and cute Yamba the Honey Ant dolls, modeled after a kids' character on the local Aboriginal television station, Imparja.

## 3 Road Trips from Alice Springs

The key attraction of a day trip to the MacDonnell Ranges is unspoiled natural scenery and few crowds. Many companies run coach or four-wheel-drive tours—half- or full-day, or overnight—to the West and East Macs. Some options appear in "Organized Tours" in the "Alice Springs" section, above. Expect to pay about A$100 (US$80) per person for a full-day trip. Families and backpackers alike love getting around with **Wayward Bus** ★ (✆ **08/8410 8833;** www.waywardbus.com.au). The company runs buses across the desert from Alice Springs on a 3-night camping trip stopping at Kings Canyon and Uluru. You can sleep in a tent or in a swag—a waterproof sleeping bag (you can see the stars as you drop off). Tours cost A$330 (US$264), plus A$25 (US$20) park admission fee, for adults and A$235 (US$188) for kids up to 15.

### THE WEST MACDONNELL RANGES ★

**WEST MACDONNELL NATIONAL PARK** The 300km (186-mile) round-trip drive west from Alice Springs into West MacDonnell National Park is a stark but picturesque trip to a series of red gorges, semidesert country, and the occasional peaceful swimming hole.

From Alice, take Larapinta Drive west for 18km (11 miles) to the 8km (5-mile) turnoff to **Simpson's Gap,** a water hole lined with ghost gums. Black-footed rock wallabies hop out on the cliffs in the late afternoon (you may want to time a visit here on your way back to Alice). There are a couple of trails, including a .5km (.35-mile) Ghost Gum circuit, and a 17km (11-mile) round-trip trail to Bond Gap. Swimming is not permitted. The place has an information center/ranger station and free barbecues.

Twenty-three kilometers (14 miles) farther down Larapinta Road, 9km (5½ miles) down a turnoff, is **Standley Chasm** (✆ **08/8956 7440**). This rock cleft is only a few meters wide but 80m (262 ft.) high, reached by a 10-minute creek-side trail. Aim to be here at midday, when the walls glow orange in the overhead sun. A kiosk sells snacks and drinks. Admission is A$6 (US$4.80) for adults and A$4.50 (US$3.60) for seniors and children 5 to 14. The chasm is open daily from 8am to 6pm (last admission at 5pm; closed Dec 25).

Six kilometers (3¾ miles) past Standley Chasm, you can branch right onto Namatjira Drive or continue to Hermannsburg Historical Precinct (see below). If you take Namatjira Drive, you'll go 42km (26 miles) to picturesque **Ellery Creek Big Hole.** The spring-fed water is so chilly that the tourism authority warns swimmers to take a flotation device in case of cramping. A 3km (2-mile) walking trail explains the area's geological history.

Eleven kilometers (7 miles) farther along Namatjira Drive is **Serpentine Gorge,** where a trail leads up to a lookout for a lovely view of the ranges through the gorge walls. Another 12km (7½ miles) on are **ocher pits,** which Aboriginal people quarried for body paint and for decorating objects used in ceremonial performances. Twenty-six

kilometers (16 miles) farther west, 8km (5 miles) from the main road, is **Ormiston Gorge and Pound** (✆ **08/8956 7799** for the ranger station/visitor center). This is a good spot to picnic, swim in the deep pool below red cliffs, and walk a choice of trails, such as the 30-minute Ghost Gum Lookout trail or the 7km (4-mile) scenic loop (allow 3–4 hr.). The water is warm enough for swimming in the summer. You can camp for A$6.60 (US$5.30) per adult, and A$3.30 (US$2.65) per child 5 to 15. The campground has no powered sites has hot showers, toilets, and free barbecues.

A bit farther on is **Glen Helen Gorge,** where the Finke River cuts through the ranges, with more gorge swimming, a walking trail, guided hikes, and helicopter flights. Modest **Glen Helen Resort** (✆ **1800/896 110** in Australia, or 08/8956 7489; www.glenhelen.com.au) has 25 motel rooms (A$143/US$114 double); bunkhouses for four (A$19/US$15 per person); and campgrounds (A$9/US$7.20 per person for a tent site, A$22/US$18 double for a powered campsite). Also here are a bar, a restaurant serving three meals a day, and barbecues for which the resort sells meat packs. The resort offers 2-day trips of the area.

**GETTING THERE** You can arrange to be dropped off by an **Alice Wanderer Centre Sightseeing** bus (✆ **08/8952 2111;** www.alicewanderer.com.au) at several stops in the Ranges. It costs A$75 (US$60) for two people for the round-trip to Simpson's Gap, A$95 (US$76) to Standley Chasm, A$170 (US$136) to Serpentine Gorge, and

## Tips Road Trips to the East & West Macs

Facilities are scarce outside Alice, so bring food (perhaps a picnic or meat to barbecue), drinking water, and a full gas tank. Leaded, unleaded, and diesel fuel are for sale at Glen Helen Resort and Hermannsburg. Wear walking shoes.

Many of the water holes dry up too much to be good for swimming—those at Ellery Creek, Ormiston Gorge, and Glen Helen are the most permanent. Being spring-fed, they can be intensely cold, so take only short dips to avoid cramping and hypothermia, don't swim alone, and be careful of underwater snags. Don't wear sunscreen because it pollutes drinking water for native animals.

Two-wheel-drive rental cars will not be insured on unsealed (unpaved) roads—that means the last few miles into Trephina Gorge Nature Park and the 11km (7-mile) road into N'Dhala Gorge Nature Park, both in the East Macs. If you are prepared to risk it, you will probably get into Trephina in a two-wheel-drive car, but you will need a four-wheel-drive for N'Dhala and Arltunga. The West MacDonnell road is paved to Glen Helen Gorge; a few points of interest may require driving for short lengths on unpaved road. Before setting off, drop into the CATIA Visitor Information Centre (see "Visitor Information," earlier in this chapter) for tips on road conditions and for details on the free ranger talks, walks, and slide shows that take place in the West and East Macs from April through October. Admission to all sights, parks, and reserves (except Standley Chasm) is free.

A$200 (US$160) to Ormiston Gorge. If you plan to camp out, then call ✆ **1300/650 730** in Australia to register your intentions (it's voluntary but worth it if you get lost—a rescue team will try to find you). You must pay a A$50 (US$40) refundable deposit by credit card. Take plenty of water. Alice Wanderer also does group tours to the area.

**HERMANNSBURG HISTORICAL PRECINCT** An alternative to visiting the West Mac gorges is to stay on Larapinta Drive all 128km (79 miles) from Alice Springs to the old **Lutheran Mission** at the **Hermannsburg Historical Precinct** (✆ **08/8956 7402**). Some maps show this route as an unpaved road, but it is paved. Settled by German missionaries in the 1870s, this is a cluster of restored farmhouse-style mission buildings. There are a museum, a gallery housing landscapes by Aussie artist Albert Namatjira, and tearooms serving apple strudel from an old German recipe. The Mission is open April to October daily from 9am to 4pm (10am–4pm Nov–Mar). Admission to the precinct with tea or coffee is A$4.50 (US$3.60) for adults, A$3 (US$2.40) for school-age kids, or A$12 (US$9.60) for families, plus A$3.50 (US$2.80) per adult or A$2.50 (US$2) per child for a guided gallery tour, which departs every hour. The precinct is closed from December 24 to January 2 or 3, and on Good Friday.

**FINKE GORGE NATIONAL PARK** The 46,000-hectare (113,620-acre) **Finke Gorge National Park** is about 2-hour's drive west of Alice Springs. Turn south off Larapinta Drive just west of Hermannsburg. Access along the last 16km (10 miles) of road, which follows the sandy bed of the Finke River, is unpaved and limited to 4WD vehicles only. Heavy rains may cause this section of the road to be impassable. The park is most famous for **Palm Valley,** where groves of rare *Livistona mariae* cabbage palms have survived since central Australia was a jungle millions of years ago. Four walking trails between 1.5km (1 mile) and 5km (3 miles) take you among the palms or up to a lookout over cliffs; one is a signposted trail exploring Aboriginal culture. There is a campsite about 4km (2½ miles) from the palms; it has showers, toilets, and free barbecues. Collect your firewood outside the park. Camping is A$6.60 (US$5.30) for adults, A$3.30 (US$2.65) for kids 5 to 15. For information, call the CATIA Visitor Information Centre in Alice Springs before you leave because there is no visitor center in the park. The ranger station (✆ **08/8956 7401**) is for emergencies only.

## THE EAST MACDONNELL RANGES

Not as many tourists tread the path on the Ross Highway into the East Macs, but if you do, you'll be rewarded with lush walking trails, fewer crowds, and traces of Aboriginal history. I even spotted wild camels on my visit.

The first points of interest are **Emily Gap,** 10km (6 miles) from Alice, and **Jessie Gap,** an additional 7km (4½ miles), a pretty picnic spot. You can cool off in the Emily Gap swimming hole if there is any water. Don't miss the "Caterpillar Dreaming" Aboriginal art on the wall, on your right as you walk through.

At **Corroboree Rock,** 37km (23 miles) farther, you can make a short climb up the outcrop, which was important to local Aborigines. The polished rock "seat" high up in the hole means Aboriginal people must have used this rock for eons.

Twenty-two kilometers (14 miles) farther is the turnoff to **Trephina Gorge Nature Park,** an 18-sq.-km (7-sq.-mile) beauty spot with walking trails ranging from 45 minutes to 4½ hours. The last 5km (3 miles) of the 9km (5½-mile) road into the park are unpaved, but you can make it in a two-wheel-drive car.

**N'Dhala Gorge Nature Park,** 10km (6 miles) past Trephina Gorge Nature Park, houses an "open-air art gallery" of rock carvings, or petroglyphs, left by the Eastern Arrernte Aboriginal people. An interesting 1.5km (1-mile) signposted trail explains the Dreamtime meanings of a few of the 6,000 rock carvings, hundreds or thousands of years old, that are thought to be in this eerily quiet gorge. A four-wheel-drive vehicle is a must to traverse the 11km (7-mile) access road.

The Ross Highway is paved all the way to Ross River Resort, 86km (53 miles) from Alice Springs.

## 4 Kings Canyon

Anyone who saw the movie *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* will remember the stony plateau the transvestites climb to gaze over the plain below. You can stand on that same spot (wearing sequined underpants is optional) at **Kings Canyon** in **Watarrka National Park** (✆ **08/8956 7460** for park headquarters). As the crow flies, it is 320km (198 miles) southwest of Alice Springs. The sandstone walls of the canyon drop about 100m (330 ft.) to rock pools and centuries-old gum trees. There is little to do except walk the dramatic canyon rim for a sense of the peaceful emptiness of the Australian Outback.

**GETTING THERE** The best way is to drive. No regular flights operate, but **Ayers Rock Scenic Flights** (✆ **08/8956 2345;** www.phs.com.au/ayersroc.htm) does an aerial day trip from Ayers Rock Resort that incorporates a guided canyon walk; it costs A$595 (US$476) per person.

Numerous **four-wheel-drive** tour outfits head to Kings Canyon from Alice Springs or Uluru (Ayers Rock), with time allowed for the rim walk. See "Exploring the Red Centre," earlier in this chapter, for recommended companies.

With a four-wheel-drive, you can get to Kings Canyon from Alice Springs on the unpaved Mereenie Loop Road. The route is the 480km (349-mile) trip from Alice Springs south on the Stuart Highway, then west onto the Lasseter Highway, then north and west on the Luritja Road. All three roads are paved. Uluru (Ayers Rock) is 306km (190 miles) to the south on a paved road; from Yulara, take the Lasseter Highway east for 125km (78 miles), then turn left onto Luritja Road and go 168km (104 miles) to Kings Canyon Resort. The resort sells leaded and unleaded gas and diesel.

**GETTING AROUND** **AAT Kings** (✆ **1800/334 009** in Australia, 08/8952 1700 in Alice Springs, or 08/8956 2171 in Uluru/Ayers Rock; www.aatkings.com) provides a 1-day tour to Kings canyon from the Ayers Rock Resort for A$103 (US$82) per person. You can book through AAT Kings or the resort.

### WHERE TO STAY & DINE

A good budget option is the **Kings Canyon YHA,** Ernest Giles Road, Watarrka National Park, Kings Canyon, NT 0872 (✆ **08/8956 7442;** www.yha.com.au). In addition to 24 dorm rooms, each sleeping four per room, there are 12 twin and double rooms. Dorm rooms cost A$34 (US$27) per person, and the twins and doubles cost A$90 (US$72).

**Kings Canyon Resort** This attractive, low-slung complex 7km (4⅓ miles) from Kings Canyon blends into its surroundings. All but four of the larger deluxe rooms were built in 1999 and have desert views from glass-enclosed Jacuzzis. The remaining rooms are typical hotel accommodations, comfortable enough, with restful range

views from the balcony. Thirty-two units have Jacuzzis. The double/twin, shared quad, and family lodge rooms are adequate low-budget choices, with a communal kitchen and bathroom facilities. Children are not permitted in lodge rooms unless you book the entire room. The resort has a well-stocked minimart where you can buy meat for the barbecues. Live entertainment plays some nights, and a ranger gives a slide show several nights a week. Internet access is available.

Luritja Rd., Watarrka National Park, NT 0872. ✆ **1800/817 622** in Australia, or 08/8956 7442. Fax 08/8956 7426. www.voyages.com.au. 164 units, 128 with bathroom; 72 powered campsites and tent sites. July–Nov A$330–A$397 (US$264–US$318) hotel double; Dec–June A$277–A$343 (US$222–US$274) hotel double. Extra adult A$27 (US$22). Children under 16 stay free in parent's room with existing bedding. July–Nov A$100 (US$80) lodge double; A$168 (US$134) quad; A$185 (US$148) family unit for up to 5. Dec–June A$98 (US$78) lodge double; A$163 (US$130) quad; A$178 (US$142) family. Tent site A$28 (US$22) double; powered site A$32 (US$26) double. Extra adult A$11 (US$8.80), extra child 6–15 A$5 (US$4) in powered campsite. Children under 16 dine free at restaurant breakfast and dinner buffets with a paying adult. Ask about packages with Ayers Rock Resort and Alice Springs Resort. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; cafe; 2 bars; 2 outdoor unheated pools; outdoor lit tennis court; volleyball court; bike rental (from nearby gas station); tour desk; limited room service; coin-op laundry. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge. Hotel only: TV w/pay movies, minibar, hair dryer, iron.

**Kings Creek Station** Staying in these permanent canvas safari cabins feels like upmarket camping, but where else have you camped out in a nice bed with camels outside your door? This chunk of orange Outback, 35km (22 miles) from Kings Canyon, is home to the largest exporter of wild camels in Australia (millions of the beasts roam the arid interior of the continent). There are lots of things to do, including camel safaris, quad-bike tours, and helicopter rides. Accommodations are basic but clean, and there are campsites, a pleasant swimming pool, and shared bathrooms nearby.

Kings Creek Station, Luritja Rd. (post: PMD 164), Alice Springs, NT 0872. ✆ **08/8956 7474.** www.kingscreekstation.com.au. Safari cabins A$55 (US$44) adults, A$36 (US$29) children 6–12. Rates include cooked breakfast. Campsites A$13 (US$10) adults, A$7.50 (US$6) children. MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; outdoor swimming pool; kitchen; shop. *In room:* No phone.

## EXPLORING THE PARK

The way to explore the canyon is on the 6km (3-¾ mile) **walk** up the side (short but steep!) and around the rim. Even if you're in good shape, it's a strenuous 3- to 4-hour hike. It leads through a maze of sandstone formations called the Lost City, across a bridge to a fern-fringed pocket of water holes called the Garden of Eden, and back through more sandstone rocks. There are lookout points en route. If you visit after the odd rainfall, the walls teem with waterfalls. In winter, don't set off too early because sunlight doesn't light up the canyon walls to good effect until midmorning.

If you're not up to making the rim walk, take the 2.6km (1.5-mile) round-trip trail along the mostly dry **Kings Creek bed** on the canyon floor. It takes about an hour. Wear sturdy boots because the ground can be rocky. This walk is all right for young kids and travelers in wheelchairs for the first kilometer (just over .5 mile).

Both walks are signposted. Avoid the rim walk in the middle of the day between September and May, when it's too hot.

You can also explore the park from an Aboriginal viewpoint with **Lilla Aboriginal Tours** (book through Kings Canyon Resort, described above). Aboriginal guides take you on an easy 1km (just over ½-mile) walk to sacred caves and rock-painting sites. You learn about the artworks, hear the Dreamtime events that created the land around you, discover plant medicines and food, and have a go at throwing a spear and a boomerang. The tour lasts 1½ to 2 hours and departs at 9am and 4pm daily (closed mid-Dec to mid-Jan) from the Lilla community, 14km (8¾ miles) from Kings Canyon

Resort. The resort offers transfers for A$20 (US$16) per person round-trip, or A$30 (US$24) for two of you. The tour costs A$39 (US$31) for adults, A$33 (US$26) for seniors and students, and A$27 (US$22) for kids 5 to 16.

**Professional Helicopter Services** (✆ **08/8956 7873;** www.phs.com.au) makes 15-minute flights over the canyon from A$70 (US$56) per person.

## 5 Uluru–Kata Tjuta National Park (Ayers Rock/The Olgas) ★

462km (286 miles) SW of Alice Springs; 1,934km (1,199 miles) S of Darwin; 1,571km (974 miles) N of Adelaide; 2,841km (1,761 miles) NW of Sydney

Uluru (Ayers Rock) is the Australia tourism industry's pinup icon, a glamorous red stone that has probably been splashed on more posters than Cindy Crawford has been on magazine covers. Just why people trek from all over the world to gawk at it is a bit of a mystery. For its size? Hardly—nearby Mount Conner is three times as big. For its shape? Probably not—most folks agree the neighboring Kata Tjuta (the Olgas) is more picturesque. You can put its popularity down to the faint shiver up the spine and the indescribable sense of place it evokes in anyone who looks at it. Even Aussie bushmen reckon it's "got somethin' spiritual about it."

In 1985 the **Uluru–Kata Tjuta National Park** ★ was returned to its Aboriginal owners, the Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara people, known as the Anangu, who manage the property jointly with the Australian government. People used to speculate that the Rock was a meteorite, but we now know it was formed by sediments laid down 600 million to 700 million years ago in an inland sea and thrust up above ground 348m (1,141 ft.) by geological forces. With a circumference of 9.4km (6 miles), the Rock is no pebble, especially because two-thirds of it is thought to be underground. On photos it looks like a big smooth blob. In the flesh, it's more interesting—dappled with holes and overhangs, with curtains of stone draping its sides, creating little coves hiding water holes and Aboriginal rock art. It also changes color from pink to a deep wine red depending on the slant of the sun.

Don't think a visit to Uluru is about snapping a few photos and going home. You can walk around the Rock, climb it (although the Aborigines prefer you don't), fly over it, ride a camel to it, circle it on a Harley-Davidson, trek through the Olgas, eat in an outdoor restaurant, tour the night sky, and join Aboriginal people on guided walks.

Give yourself at least a day in the Uluru area; you could easily stay two or three.

Isolation (and a lack of competition) makes things like accommodations, meals, and transfers expensive. A coach tour or four-wheel-drive camping safari is often the cheapest way to see the place. See "Exploring the Red Centre," earlier in this chapter, for recommended tour companies.

### ESSENTIALS

**GETTING THERE** **By Plane** **Qantas** (✆ **13 13 13** in Australia, or 800/227-4500 in the U.S. and Canada) flies to Ayers Rock (Connellan) Airport direct from Sydney, Alice Springs, Perth, and Cairns. Flights from other ports go via Alice Springs. The airport is 6km (3¾ miles) from Ayers Rock Resort. Expect to pay around A$320 (US$256) one-way. A free shuttle ferries all resort guests, including campers, to their door.

**By Car** Take the Stuart Highway south from Alice Springs 199km (123 miles), turn right onto the Lasseter Highway, and go 244km (151 miles) to Ayers Rock

### Tips The Rock in a Day?

It's a looooong day to visit Uluru in a day from Alice by road. Many organized coach tours pack a lot—perhaps a Rock base walk or climb, Kata Tjuta (the Olgas), the Uluru–Kata Tjuta Cultural Centre, and a champagne sunset at the Rock—into a busy trip that leaves Alice around 5:30 or 6am and gets you back late at night. **Murray Cosson's Australian Outback Flights** (✆ **08/8952 4625;** www.australianoutbackflights.com.au) offers an aerial day trip from Alice Springs that includes flights over Kings Canyon, Gosse Bluff meteorite crater, and Lake Amadeus; a rental car at Uluru (Ayers Rock); national park admission fee; and lunch. It costs A$660 (US$528) per person (minimum two passengers). There are more tour options, too.

You should consider a day trip only between May and September. At other times, it's too hot to do much from early morning to late afternoon.

Resort. The Rock is 18km (11 miles) farther on. (Everyone mistakes the flat-topped mesa they see en route for Uluru; it's Mount Conner.)

Only Avis, Hertz, and Thrifty have Uluru depots: Thrifty charges around A$110 (US$88) a day for bookings under 3 days; Hertz charges A$137 (US$110) a day for bookings under 7 days; and Avis charges A$137 (US$110) a day for bookings of 2 days or less. If you want to rent a car in Alice Springs and drop it at Uluru, brace yourself for a one-way penalty.

**VISITOR INFORMATION** For information before you leave, contact the **Central Australian Tourism Industry Association (CATIA),** 60 Gregory Terrace, Alice Springs (✆ **08/8952 5800;** www.centralaustraliantourism.com), or drop into its **Visitor Information Centre** at the same location. One of the best online sources is Ayers Rock Resort's site (**www.voyages.com.au**).

The **Ayers Rock Resort Visitor Centre** (✆ **08/8957 7377**), next to the Desert Gardens Hotel, has displays on the area's geology, wildlife, and Aboriginal heritage, plus a souvenir store. It's open daily from 8:30am to 7:30pm. You can book tours at the **tour desk** in every hotel at Ayers Rock Resort or visit the **Ayers Rock Resort Tour & Information Centre** (✆ **08/8957 7324**) at the shopping center in the resort complex. It dispenses information on and books tours as far afield as Kings Canyon and Alice Springs. It's open daily from 7:30am to 8:30pm.

One kilometer (just over ½ mile) from the base of the Rock is the **Uluru–Kata Tjuta Cultural Centre** ★ (✆ **08/8956 3138**), owned and run by the Anangu, the Aboriginal owners of Uluru. It uses eye-catching wall displays, frescoes, interactive recordings, and videos to tell about Aboriginal Dreamtime myths and laws. It's worth spending some time here to understand a little about Aboriginal culture. A National Park desk has information on ranger-guided activities and animal, plant, and bird-watching checklists. The center also has a cafe, a souvenir shop, and two Aboriginal arts and crafts galleries. It's open daily from early in the morning to after sundown; exact hours vary from month to month.

**PARK ENTRANCE FEES** Admission to the Uluru–Kata Tjuta National Park is A$25 (US$20) per adult, free for children under 16, valid for 3 days. The cost of many organized tours includes the admission fee.

**ETIQUETTE** The Anangu ask you not to photograph sacred sites or Aboriginal people without permission and to approach quietly and respectfully.

## GETTING AROUND

Getting around the park is expensive. Ayers Rock Resort runs a **free shuttle** every 15 minutes or so around the resort complex from 10:30am to after midnight, but to get to the Rock or Kata Tjuta (the Olgas), you will need to take transfers, join a tour, or have your own wheels. The shuttle also meets all flights.

**BY SHUTTLE** **Uluru Express** (✆ **08/8956 2152;** www.uluruexpress.com.au) provides a minibus shuttle from Ayers Rock Resort to and from the Rock about every 50 minutes from before sunrise to sundown, and several times a day to the Olgas. The basic shuttle costs A$35 (US$28) for adults and A$20 (US$16) for kids (including to see the sunset); a sunrise trip costs A$40 (US$32) for adults and A$20 (US$16) for kids. To the Olgas, it costs A$50 (US$40) for adults and A$25 (US$20) for children. A 3-day pass covering as many trips as you like to both sites costs A$140 (US$112) for adults and A$60 (US$48) for kids. A combined Uluru and Olgas trip costs A$55 (US$44) for adults and A$30 (US$24) for kids. All fares are round-trip.

**BY CAR** If there are two of you, the easiest and cheapest way to get around is likely to be a rental car. All roads in the area are paved, so a four-wheel-drive is unnecessary. Expect to pay around A$70 to A$95 (US$56–US$76) per day for a medium-size car. Rates drop a little in low season. Most car-rental companies give you the first 100km (63 miles) free and charge A30¢ (US25¢) per kilometer after that. Take this into account because the round-trip from the resort to the Olgas is just over 100km (63 miles), and that's without driving about 20km (13 miles) to the Rock and back. **Avis** (✆ **08/8956 2266**), **Hertz** (✆ **08/8956 2244**), and **Thrifty** (✆ **08/8956 2030**) book four-wheel-drives through their Darwin offices. All rent regular cars and four-wheel-drives.

The **Outback Travel Shop** ★ (✆ **08/8955 5288;** www.outbacktravelshop.com.au), a booking agent in Alice Springs, often has better deals on car-rental rates than you'll get by booking direct.

**BY ORGANIZED TOUR** Several tour companies run a big range of daily sunrise and sunset viewings, circumnavigations of the Rock by coach or on foot, guided walks at the Rock or the Olgas, camel rides, observatory evenings, visits to the Uluru–Kata Tjuta Cultural Centre, and innumerable permutations and combinations of all of these. Some offer "passes" containing the most popular activities. Virtually every company picks you up at your hotel. Among the most reputable are **Discovery Ecotours** (formerly Uluru Experience and Alice Experience) and **AAT Kings** (see "Exploring the Red Centre," earlier in this chapter, for details on both companies).

**ABORIGINAL TOURS** Because **Anangu Tours** ★★ (✆ **08/8956 2123;** www.anangutours.com.au) is owned and run by the Rock's Aboriginal owners, its tours give you firsthand insight into Aboriginal culture. Tours are in the Anangu language and translated by an interpreter. They are not cheap, but if you are going to spend money on just one tour, this group is a good choice.

They also do a **Kuniya** walk where you visit the Uluru–Kata Tjuta Cultural Centre and the Mutitjulu water hole at the base of the Rock, learn about bush foods, and see rock paintings, before watching the sunset. It departs daily March through October at 2:30pm, and November through February at 3:30pm. With hotel pickup, the tour costs A$85 (US$68) for adults and A$60 (US$48) for children. If you drive to

the Cultural Center yourself, it costs A$55 (US$44) for adults and A$27 (US$22) for kids. There's also a 4½-hour breakfast tour for A$108 (US$86) for adults and A$74 (US$59) for children. It includes a base tour and demonstrations of bush skills and spear-throwing.

For an Aboriginal insight into the Rock without paying for a tour, join the free **Mala Walk** ★ (see "Walking, Driving, or Busing Around It," below); it discusses Aboriginal culture and is often led by an Aboriginal park ranger.

## WHERE TO STAY & DINE

**Ayers Rock Resort** not only is in the township of Yulara—it is the township. About 30km (19 miles) from the Rock, outside the national park boundary, it is the only place to stay. It is an impressive, contemporary complex, built to a high standard, efficiently run, and attractive—all things you can end up paying an arm and a leg for. Because everyone either is a tourist or lives and works here, it has a village atmosphere—with a supermarket; a bank; a post office; babysitting services; a medical center; a beauty salon; several gift, clothing, and souvenir shops; a place to buy beer; and a gas station.

You have a choice of several places to stay within the complex, from hotel rooms and apartments to luxury and basic campsites. In keeping with this village feel, no matter where you stay, even in the campground, you are free to use all the pools, restaurants, and other facilities of every hostelry, except the rather glamorous Sails in the Desert pool, which is reserved for Sails guests.

**Voyages Hotels & Resorts** manages Ayers Rock Resort, Alice Springs Resort, and Kings Canyon Resort. You can book accommodations for all three properties through the reservations office in Sydney (✆ **1300/139 889** in Australia, or 02/9339 1040; fax 02/9332 4555; www.voyages.com.au). Ask about packages that include one, two, or all three resorts. ***Warning:*** Shop around for prices on the Internet and with travel agencies. My experience is that people staying here have paid a whole range of prices.

High season is July through November. Book well ahead.

A tour desk, same-day dry-cleaning and laundry service, and babysitting are all available at each hostelry and campground.

In addition to the dining options below, the resort's shopping center has the pleasant **Gecko's Café,** which offers wood-fired pizzas, pastas, and sandwiches; a bakery; an ice creamery; and takeout. Sails in the Desert, Desert Gardens, and the Outback Pioneer Hotel & Lodge can provide picnic hampers and breakfast backpacks. Kids under 15 dine free at any of the hotels' buffets with a paying adult. It's a good idea to bring some wine with you because the place really has things sewn up, including prices.

**Ayers Rock Campground** Instead of red dust you get green lawns at this campground, which has barbecues, a playground, Internet access, a small general store, and clean communal bathrooms and kitchen. If you don't want to camp but want to travel cheap, consider the modern cabins. They're a great value; each has air-conditioning, a

**Tips Water, Water . . .**

Water taps are scarce and kiosks nonexistent in Uluru–Kata Tjuta National Park. Always carry your own drinking water when sightseeing.

### *Moments* When You See the Southern Cross for the First Time . . .

Light pollution is extremely low in the Red Centre, so the night sky is a dazzler. At the Ayers Rock Observatory, you can check out your zodiac constellation and take a 1-hour tour of the Southern Hemisphere heavens. (They're different from the Northern Hemisphere stars.) To visit the observatory, you must join a tour with **Discovery Ecotours** (✆ **1800/803 174** in Australia, or 08/8956 2563; www.discoveryecotours.com.au), which provides pickup and a tour. Tours depart twice a night; times vary. They cost A$32 (US$26) for adults, A$24 (US$19) for children 6 to 15. Family rates are available on request.

TV, a kitchenette with a fridge, dining furniture, a double bed, and four bunks. They book up quickly in winter.

**Thrifty** (✆ **08/8956 2030**) at Uluru rents its customers a complete camping kit with sleeping bags, tents, cooking equipment, and so on for A$401 (US$321) for 5 days out of Ayers Rock. You must hire as part of a car deal (a medium car with camping gear for 5 days, plus good insurance will cost around A$1,070/US$856). You need to book rental cars in Uluru at least 2 weeks ahead. Contact **Hertz** (✆ **08/8956 2244**) for a similar deal.

Yulara Dr., Yulara, NT 0872. ✆ **08/8956 2055.** Fax 08/8956 2260. 220 tent sites, 198 powered sites, 14 cabins, none with bathroom. A$150 (US$120) cabin for up to 6; A$25 (US$20) double tent site; A$30 (US$24) powered motor-home site; A$25 (US$20) unpowered motor-home site. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Unheated outdoor pool; playground; free airport shuttle; coin-op laundry. *In room:* A/C, TV, kitchenette, fridge, no phone.

**Outback Pioneer Hotel and YHA Lodge** A happy all-ages crowd congregates at this midrange collection of hotel rooms, budget rooms, shared bunk rooms, and dorms. Thirty rooms were added in 2002, offering clean, simple accommodations with private bathrooms; these are cheaper than the standard hotel rooms but more expensive than the existing budget rooms. Standard rooms come with a queen-size bed and a single; these have TVs with pay movies, a fridge, a minibar, and a phone. Some budget rooms have a TV and a fridge; 24 of the budget rooms come with two bunk beds and have private bathrooms. A dozen budget rooms have a double bed and a bunk; these share bathrooms. Each quad bunk room holds two sets of bunk beds; these are co-ed and share bathrooms. Children under 16 aren't allowed in bunk rooms unless you book the entire room. Plenty of lounge chairs sit by the pool, and there's also an Internet lounge. You can book through the YHA (www.yha.com.au) for dorm and bunk rooms. The Bough House Restaurant offers buffets, and a kiosk sells burger-style fare. What seems like the entire resort gathers nightly at the **Outback Pioneer Barbecue** ★★. This barn with big tables, lots of beer, and live music is the place to join the throngs throwing a kangaroo steak or emu sausage on the communal cook-it-yourself barbie.

Yulara Dr., Yulara, NT 0872. ✆ **08/8957 7888.** Fax 08/8957 7615. www.yha.com.au 125 units with private bathroom; 30 budget rooms with bathroom, 12 budget rooms without bathroom; 32 quad bunkrooms; 20-bed male-only dorms, 20-bed female-only dorms. High season A$383 (US$306) double; A$184 (US$147) budget room with bathroom; A$162 (US$130) budget room without bathroom. Low season A$350 (US$280) double; A$172 (US$138) budget room with bathroom; A$152 (US$122) budget room without bathroom. Bunk room bed A$40 (US$32), dorm bed A$32 (US$26) year-round. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; bar; unheated outdoor pool; free airport shuttle. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, minibar.

*Moments* **Dinner in the Desert**

Why sit in a restaurant when you can eat outside in the dust? Because you came to the Outback to be outside, that's why. Ayers Rock Resort's **Sounds of Silence dinner** ★ makes outside eating a fascinating event. In an outdoor clearing, you sip champagne and nibble canapés as the sun sets over the Rock to the strains of a didgeridoo played by a white man (the excuse is that didgeridoos don't come from this part of the world but from Arnhemland—though there seem to be plenty of local Aborigines who play). We hope you've zeroed in on people you want to sit with by now because you head to communal white-clothed, candlelit tables and a serve-yourself meal of kangaroo and barramundi (a large freshwater fish). Last time I was here, they served pretty poor pumpkin soup to begin, the main courses varied from bland to nice, and the Aussie wines were bad examples. However, after dinner, the lanterns fade, and you are left with stillness (apart from an occasional dingo looking for scraps). It is the first time some city folk have ever heard silence. Next, an astronomer points out the constellations of the Southern Hemisphere, and you have a chance to see the stars through telescopes. Sounds of Silence is held nightly, weather permitting, and costs A$120 (US$96) for adults and A$60 (US$48) for children under 15, including transfers from Ayers Rock Resort. It's mighty popular, so book 3 months ahead in peak season. Book through the Ayers Rock Resort office in Sydney (✆ **1300/139 889** in Australia, or 02/9339 1040).

## DISCOVERING ULURU (AYERS ROCK)

**AT SUNRISE & SUNSET** The peak time to catch the Rock's beauty is sunset, when oranges, peaches, pinks, reds, and then indigo and deep violet creep across its face as if it were a giant opal. Some days it's fiery, other days the colors are muted. A sunset-viewing parking lot is on the Rock's western side. Plenty of sunset and sunrise tours operate from the resort. A typical sunset tour is that offered by **AAT Kings** (✆ **08/8956 2171** or 03/9274 7422; www.aatkings.com): It departs 90 minutes before sunset, includes a free glass of wine with which to watch the "show," and returns 20 minutes after sundown; the cost is A$38 (US$30) for adults, A$26 (US$21) for children 4 to 14. AAT Kings offers several other tours around the area, so if large-group touring is your thing, then I really suggest you check out their website before leaving home.

At sunrise the colors are less dramatic, but many folks enjoy the spectacle of the Rock unveiled by the dawn to birdsong. You'll need an early start—most tours leave about 75 minutes before sunup.

**CLIMBING IT** Aborigines refer to tourists as *minga*—little ants—because that's what we look like crawling up Uluru. It's no picnic—there's sometimes a ferociously strong wind that can blow you right off, the walls are almost vertical in places (you have to hold onto a chain), and it can be freezing cold or insanely hot. Quite a few people have died climbing the rock from heart attacks, heat stress, or simply falling

off. If you're not in good shape; have breathing difficulties, heart trouble, or high or low blood pressure; or are just plain scared of heights, don't do it. The Rock is closed to climbers during bad weather; when temperatures exceed 97°F (36°C), which they often do from November to March; and when wind speed exceeds 25 knots, so climb in the stillness of early morning. ***Warning:*** Wherever you go at Uluru and Kata Tjuta (the Olgas), bring lots of drinking water with you from the resort.

If that doesn't put you off, you'll be rewarded with views of the plain, Kata Tjuta (the Olgas), and Mount Conner. The surface is rutted with ravines about 2.5m (8¼ ft.) deep, which demand scrambling. The climb takes at least 1 hour up for the fit, and 1 hour down. The less sure-footed should allow 3 to 4 hours all told.

***Note:*** The Anangu do not like people climbing Uluru because the climb follows the trail their ancestral Dreamtime Mala men took when they first came to Uluru. They allow people to climb but strongly prefer that they don't.

**WALKING, DRIVING, OR BUSING AROUND IT** A paved road runs around the Rock. The easy 9.4km (6-mile) **Base Walk** circumnavigating Uluru takes about 2 hours, but allow time to linger around the water holes, caves, folds, and overhangs. A shorter walk is the easy 1km (just over .5-mile) round-trip trail from the **Mutitjulu** parking lot to the pretty water hole near the Rock's base, where there is some rock art. The **Liru Track** is another easy trail; it runs 2km (1.25 miles) from the Uluru–Kata Tjuta Cultural Centre to Uluru, where it links with the Base Walk.

Make time for the free daily 2km (1.25-mile) **Mala Walk** ★, where the ranger, who is often an Aborigine, explains the Dreamtime myths behind Uluru, talks about Aboriginal lifestyles and hunting techniques in days past, and explains the significance of the rock art and other sites you see along the way. The 90-minute trip leaves the Mala Walk sign at the base of the Uluru climb at 10am May through September, and at a cooler 8am October through April.

Before setting off on any walk, it's a good idea to arm yourself with the self-guided walking notes available for A$1.10 (US90¢) from the Uluru–Kata Tjuta Cultural Centre (see "Visitor Information," earlier in this chapter).

Most companies offer base tours. **Discovery Ecotours** (✆ **1800/803 174;** www.discoveryecotours.com.au) conducts a 5-hour guided base tour that gives you insight into natural history, rock art, and Dreamtime beliefs. It's scheduled to coincide with sunrise. The tour costs A$110 (US$88) for adults and A$85 (US$68) for children 6 to 15, but it's not suitable for kids under 10. The company also runs a 4-hour sunset trip to the Olgas for A$80 (US$64) for adults and A$60 (US$48) for kids.

**FLYING OVER IT** Several companies do scenic flights by light aircraft or helicopter over Uluru, Kata Tjuta (the Olgas), nearby Mount Conner, the vast white saltpan of Lake Amadeus, and as far as Kings Canyon. Helicopters don't land on top of the Rock, however. **Professional Helicopter Services** (✆ **08/8956 2003;** www.phs.com.au) does

**Tips Travel Tip**

Most tourists visit Uluru in the mornings and Kata Tjuta (the Olgas) in the afternoon. Reverse the order (do the Valley of the Winds in the morning and Uluru in the afternoon) and you'll find both spots more silent and spiritual.

a 12- to 15-minute flight over Uluru for A$105 (US$84) per adult, and a 25- to 30-minute flight, which includes the Olgas, for A$205 (US$164). Kids under 13 usually pay half-price (depending more on their weight than on their age). You can drive to the helicopter site on a Harley-Davidson for A$50 (US$40) one-way and A$75 (US$60) round-trip.

**MOTORCYCLING AROUND IT** Harley-Davidson tours are available as sunrise or sunset rides, laps of the Rock, and various other Rock and Kata Tjuta (Olgas) tours with time for the Olgas walks. A blast out to the Rock at sunset with **Uluru Motorcycle Tours** (✆ **08/8956 2019**) will set you back A$145 (US$116), which includes a glass of champagne. The guide drives the bike; you sit behind and hang on. You can also rent a Harley for a half-day for A$365 (US$292).

**VIEWING IT ON CAMELBACK** Legend has it that a soul travels at the same pace as a camel; it's certainly a peaceful way to see the Rock. **Frontier Camel Tours** (✆ **1800/806 499** in Australia, or 08/8956 2444; www.cameltours.com.au) makes daily forays aboard "ships of the desert" to view Uluru. Amble through red sand dunes with great views of the Rock, dismount to watch the sun rise or sink over it, and ride back to the depot for billy tea and beer bread in the morning, or champagne in the evening. The 1-hour rides depart Ayers Rock Resort 1 hour before sunrise or 1½ hours before sunset, and cost A$95 (US$76) per person, including transfers from your hotel. For A$60 (US$48) per person you can ride out into the desert to view Uluru and the Olgas from a distance. The tour leaves daily at midday and takes around 1½ hours. Each day between 10:30am and midday, you can visit the camels free of charge and take a short ride for A$10 (US$8) for adults, A$5 (US$4) for kids 6 to 12, or A$25 (US$20) for families. All tours leave from the Camel Depot at the Ayers Rock Resort.

## EXPLORING THE OLGAS

Although not everyone has heard of massive **Mt. Olga** ★ (or "the Olgas"), a sister monolith an easy 50km (31-mile) drive west of Uluru, many folks who have say it's lovelier and more mysterious, and I agree. Known to the Aborigines as Kata Tjuta, or "many heads," the Olgas' 36 momentous red domes bulge out of the earth like turned clay on a potter's wheel. The tallest dome is 200m (656 ft.) higher than Uluru. The Olgas are more important in Aboriginal Dreamtime legend than Uluru.

Two walking trails take you in among the domes: the 7.4km (4.5-mile) **Valley of the Winds** ★ walk, which is challenging and takes 3 to 5 hours, and the easy 2.6km (1.5-mile) **Gorge** walk, which takes about an hour. The Valley of the Winds trail is the more rewarding in terms of scenery. Both have lookout points and shady stretches. The Valley of the Winds trail closes when temperatures rise above 97°F (36°C).

# 9

# The Top End

*by Lee Mylne*

The Top End is a last frontier; a vast sweep of barely inhabited country from Broome on the west coast to Arnhemland in the Northern Territory and eastern Queensland. Most of it is in the Northern Territory, and the term is also used to differentiate the northern part of the territory from the Red Centre. It is a place of wild, rugged beauty and, sometimes, hardship.

The Northern Territory's capital, Darwin, is a small city, rich, modern, and tropical. Katherine, to its south, is a farming town famous for a beautiful river gorge. Here you can drop by on an Aboriginal community, explore vast cattle stations, canoe jungly rivers, and soak in natural thermal pools. To the east of Darwin and Katherine is World Heritage–listed Kakadu National Park, home to wetlands, crocodiles, and millions of birds—one-third of the country's bird species, in fact. Farther east is Arnhemland, a stretch of rocky escarpments and rivers owned by Aborigines and seen by few others.

Life in the Top End is different than elsewhere in Australia. Its slightly lawless image is one the locals enjoy. Isolation, the Wet season, monsoons, predatory crocodiles, and other dangers make 'em tough up here.

## EXPLORING THE TERRITORY

Read "Exploring the Red Centre" at the start of chapter 8; it contains information on traveling the entire Northern Territory.

**VISITOR INFORMATION** The **Northern Territory Tourist Commission (NTTC),** Tourism House, 43 Mitchell St., Darwin, NT 0800 (✆ **13 30 68** in Australia, or 08/8951 3900; www.travelnt.com), can supply information on Darwin, Litchfield National Park, Kakadu National Park, Katherine, and other destinations in the territory. The commission has websites tailored for international travelers (**www.australiasoutback.com**) and for the self-drive market (**www.ntexplore.com**). It also publishes a helpful annual guide to the Top End that details many hotels, tour operators, rental-car companies, and attractions, and a separate fishing guide. The Commission's Territory Discoveries division offers package deals.

The **Tourism Top End** information center in Darwin and **Katherine Visitor Information Centre** (listed in the "Darwin" and "Katherine" sections of this chapter) can supply information about the Top End in addition to their local regions.

**WHEN TO GO** The sanest time to visit the Top End is in the winter Dry season (the Dry). Not a cloud will grace the sky, and temperatures will be comfortable, even hot in the middle of the day. The Dry runs roughly from late April to the end of October. It is high season, so book every tour, hotel, or campsite in advance. The Wet season (the Wet) runs from November (sometimes as early as Oct) to March or April. While it does not rain 24 hours a day, it comes down in buckets, usually for an hour

or two each day, mainly in the late afternoon or overnight. The land floods as far as the eye can see, the humidity is murderous, and the temperatures hit the high 80s°F (30s°C). The floods cut off many attractions, sometimes suddenly, and some tour companies close up shop. Cyclones may hit the coast, with the same savagery that hurricanes hit Florida. Many people find the build-up to the Wet in October and November, when clouds gather but do not break, the toughest time to be there.

Having said all that, the Wet is a wonderful time to travel. Waterfalls become massive torrents, lightning storms crackle across the afternoon sky, the land turns green, cloud cover keeps the worst of the sun off, and crowds vanish. Keep your plans flexible to account for floods, take it real slow in the heat, and carry loads of drinking water, and you should be okay. Even if you normally camp, sleep in air-conditioned accommodations now. Book tours ahead, as most will operate on a reduced schedule.

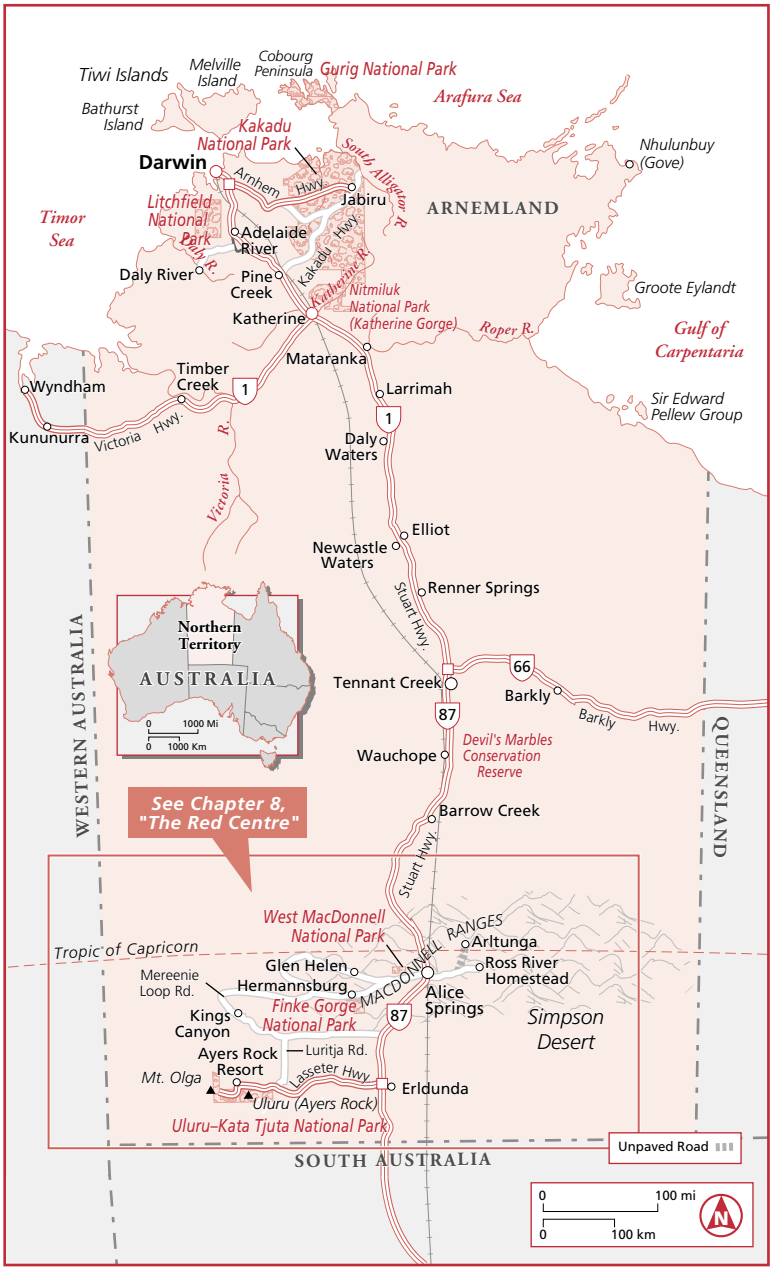
**GETTING AROUND** The **Automobile Association of the Northern Territory (AANT),** 79–81 Smith St., Darwin, NT 0800 (✆ **08/8981 3837;** www.aaa.asn.au), is a good source of maps and road advice. The **Northern Territory Tourist Commission**'s site at www.ntexplore.com is also designed specifically for those setting out on a driving holiday.

**TRAVELING IN THE WET** Some roads will be underwater through the Wet, while others can flood unexpectedly, leaving you cut off for hours, days, or even months. Flash floods pose dangers to unwary motorists. Don't cross a flooded road unless you know the water is shallow, the current gentle, and the road intact. Never wade into the water, as crocodiles may be present. If you're cut off, the only thing to do is wait, so travel with food and drinking water in remote parts. Check road conditions by calling the **Northern Territory Department of Transport & Works'** 24-hour recorded report on road conditions (✆ **1800/246 199** in Australia), dropping into or calling the AANT (see above) in Darwin, or tuning into the local radio stations. Local tour companies, tourist bureaus, and police stations should also be able to help.

**TOUR OPERATORS** Taking an organized tour can solve the hassles posed by distance, isolation, and the Wet floods in the Top End, and it will show you things you might not discover on your own. There is no shortage of companies running coach, minibus, and 4WD tours from Broome, Kununurra, Darwin, and even Alice Springs. A loop through Darwin, Litchfield National Park, Kakadu National Park, and Katherine is a popular triangle that shows you a lot in a short time.

Reputable companies include **AAT Kings** (✆ **08/8941 3844**; www.aatkings.com); **Odyssey Safaris** (✆ **1300/134 044** in Australia, or 02/9299 2103; www.odysaf.com.au); **Sahara Outback Tours** (✆ **1800/806 240** in Australia, or 08/8953 0881; www.saharatours.com.au); **Adventure Tours** (✆ **1300/654 604** in Australia, or 08/8309 2277; www.adventuretours.com.au); and **Billy Can Tours** (✆ **1800/813 484** in Australia, or 08/8947 1877; www.billycan.com.au).

**Far Out Adventures** ★★ (✆ **02/6557 6076,** or 0427/152 288 mobile; www.farout.com.au) does tailor-made four-wheel-drive safaris into Kakadu, Darwin, Arnhemland, Litchfield National Park, Katherine, the Kimberley, and more Top End regions. Proprietor-guide Mike Keighley will create a private adventure to suit your interests, budget, and time restrictions. Accommodations can range from luxury hotels to "under the stars" in Aussie bush swags (bedrolls). Touring with Mike can involve hiking, fishing, meeting or camping with his Aboriginal mates, canoeing,


Tiwi Islands
Melville Island
Cobourg Peninsula
Gurig National Park
Arafura Sea
Bathurst Island
Kakadu National Park
Darwin
Arnhem Hwy
South Alligator R.
Nhulunbuy (Gove)
Litchfield National Park
Jabiru
ARNEMLAND
Timor Sea
Adelaide River
Kakadu Hwy
Daly R.
Daly River
Pine Creek
Katherine R.
Nitmiluk National Park (Katherine Gorge)
Groote Eylandt
Katherine
Roper R.
Gulf of Carpentaria
Mataranka
Timber Creek
Wyndham
1
Larrimah
Sir Edward Pellew Group
Kununurra
Victoria Hwy.
Victoria R.
Daly Waters
Elliot
Newcastle Waters
Renner Springs
Stuart Hwy.
Northern Territory
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Tennant Creek
66
Barkly
87
Barkly Hwy.
Devil's Marbles Conservation Reserve
Wauchope
WESTERN AUSTRALIA
QUEENSLAND
See Chapter 8, "The Red Centre"
Barrow Creek
Stuart Hwy.
West MacDonnell National Park
MACDONNELL RANGES
Arltunga
Tropic of Capricorn
Glen Helen
Ross River Homestead
Mereenie Loop Rd.
Hermannsburg
Alice Springs
Finke Gorge National Park
87
Kings Canyon
Simpson Desert
Ayers Rock Resort
Luritja Rd.
Mt. Olga
Lasseter Hwy.
Erldunda
Uluru (Ayers Rock)
Uluru–Kata Tjuta National Park
Unpaved Road
SOUTH AUSTRALIA
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## Croc Alert! (& Other Safety Tips)

Saltwater **crocodiles** are a serious threat in the sea, estuaries, lakes, wetlands, waterfall pools, and rivers of the Top End—even hundreds of kilometers inland. They may be called "saltwater" crocs, but they live in freshwater. Never jump in the water or stand on the bank unless you want to be lunch.

Always carry 4 liters (a gallon) of **drinking water** per person a day when walking (increase to 1 liter/¼ gal. per person per hour in summer). Wear a broad-brimmed hat, high-factor sunscreen lotion, and insect repellent containing DEET (Aerogard and RID brands both contain it) to protect against the Ross River virus carried by mosquitoes.

Deadly **marine stingers** (box jellyfish) put a stop to ocean swimming in the Top End from October to April.

exploring seldom-seen Aboriginal rock art, taking extras like scenic flights, and swimming under (croc-free) waterfalls. Mike is one of a select group of operators with Australia's Advanced Eco Tour Accreditation and Savannah Guide status, and has a tremendous knowledge of the Top End's geography, Aboriginal culture, and ecology. Fun and personal, his trips are accompanied by good wine (sometimes in locations like a bird-filled lagoon at sunset) and "bush gourmet" meals.

**Lord's Kakadu & Arnhemland Safaris** (✆ **08/8948 2200;** www.lords-safaris.com) is based in Jabiru and operates charter tours throughout Kakadu and Arnhemland. Owner Sab Lord was born on a buffalo station in Kakadu before it was a national park and has a strong rapport with local Aborigines. His small-group 4WD tours, which can be tailor-made, visit the Injalak Hill rock-art sites in Arnhemland and the arts center at Oenpelli and have exclusive access to the Minkinj Valley. Day tours to Arnhemland cost A$180 (US$144) for adults and A$130 (US$104) for children under 14. They operate May to November. The company also runs tours to Jim Jim and Twin Falls.

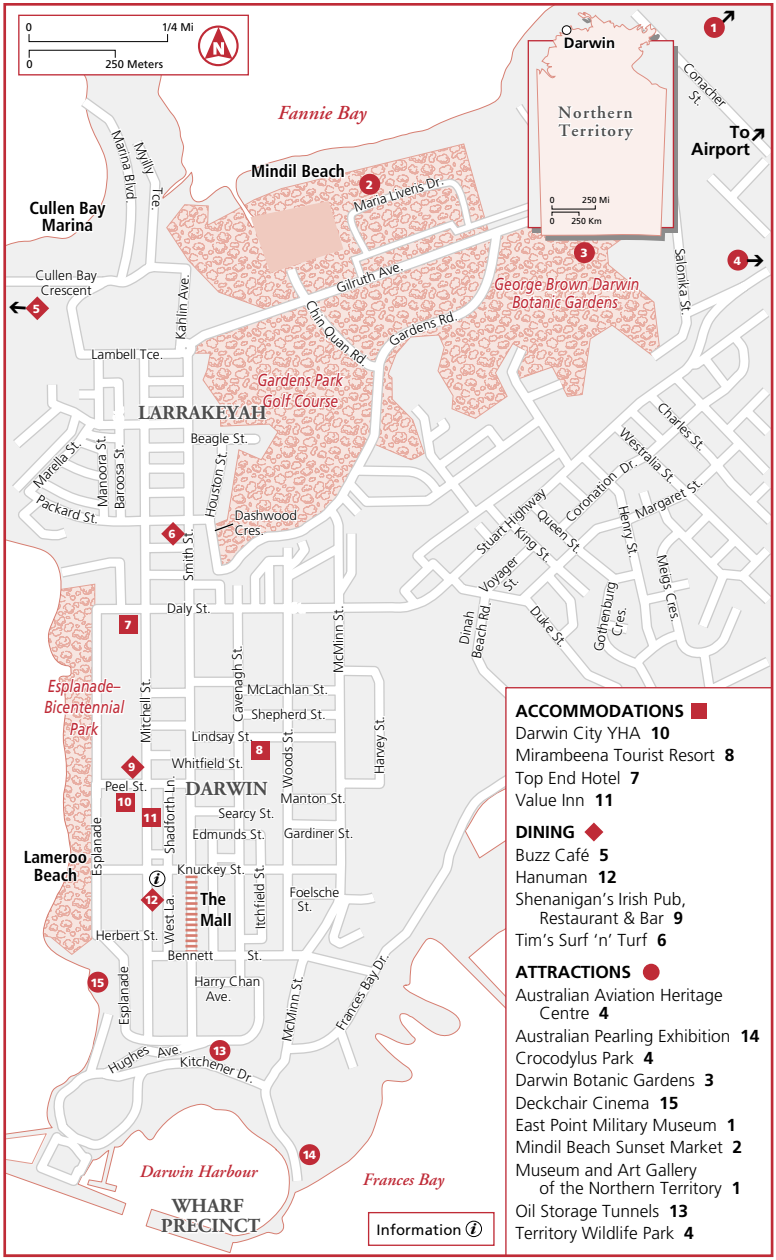
For details of tour operators running from Darwin to Broome, see "The Kimberley: A Far-Flung Wilderness" in chapter 10.

# 1 Darwin

1,489km (930 miles) N of Alice Springs

Named after the founder of the theory of evolution, Australia's northernmost capital (pop. 97,750) has proud white civic buildings, pink bougainvillea, and a touch of Asian exoticism. It's a modern tropical capital—most of it was rebuilt after Cyclone Tracy wiped out the city on Christmas Eve 1974. Don't fuss about unpacking your jacket and tie here. Shorts and rubber thongs (flip-flops) will get you most places—even the official state invitations stipulate dress as "Territory Rig," meaning long pants and a short-sleeved open-necked shirt for men.

Darwin is most commonly used as a gateway to Kakadu National Park, Katherine Gorge, and the Kimberley, and many Australians have never bothered to visit it—or at least not for long. And that's a real shame because it is an attractive and interesting




**ACCOMMODATIONS**
Darwin City YHA **10**
Mirambeena Tourist Resort **8**
Top End Hotel **7**
Value Inn **11**

**DINING**
Buzz Café **5**
Hanuman **12**
Shenanigan's Irish Pub, Restaurant & Bar **9**
Tim's Surf 'n' Turf **6**

**ATTRACTIONS**
Australian Aviation Heritage Centre **4**
Australian Pearling Exhibition **14**
Crocodylus Park **4**
Darwin Botanic Gardens **3**
Deckchair Cinema **15**
East Point Military Museum **1**
Mindil Beach Sunset Market **2**
Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory **1**
Oil Storage Tunnels **13**
Territory Wildlife Park **4**

place. Give yourself a day or two to wander the pleasant streets and parklands, visit the wildlife attractions, and discover some of the city's rich history. The wetland's fishing is excellent by boat or helicopter, as is the shopping for Aboriginal art and the Top End's South Sea pearls. An easy day trip away is the beautiful Litchfield National Park, one of the Territory's best-kept secrets.

## ESSENTIALS

**GETTING THERE** **Qantas** (✆ **13 13 13** in Australia, or 800/227-4500 in the U.S. and Canada; www.qantas.com) serves Darwin daily from most state capitals; flights either are direct or connect in Alice Springs. Qantas also flies direct from Cairns. **Virgin Blue** (✆ **13 67 89** in Australia, or 07/3295 2296; www.virginblue.com) flies direct to Darwin from Brisbane, Sydney, and Melbourne, with connections from Cairns, Canberra, the Gold Coast, Adelaide, and Perth. **Airnorth** (✆ **08/8920 4001;** www.airnorth.com.au) flies from Broome and Kununurra in Western Australia. There are also direct flights to Darwin from Asia.

**Darwin Airport Shuttle Services** (✆ **1800/358 945** in the Northern Territory, or 08/8981 5066) meets every flight and delivers adults to any hotel between the airport and city for A$8.50 (US$6.80) one-way or A$15 (US$12) round-trip. Children 6 to 13 pay A$4.50 (US$3.60) or A$8 (US$6.40) round-trip. Bookings aren't essential. A cab to the city is around A$25 (US$20). **Avis, Budget, Hertz,** and **Thrifty** have airport desks (see "Getting Around," below, for phone numbers).

**Greyhound Australia** (✆ **13 14 99** in Australia, or 07/4690 9950; www.greyhound.com.au) makes a daily coach run from Alice Springs. The trip takes around 20 hours, and the fare is A$237 (US$190). Greyhound has a daily service from Broome via Kununurra and Katherine; this trip takes around 24 hours and costs A$302 (US$242). Buses run from Cairns via Townsville and Tennant Creek, a 40-hour trip costing A$441 (US$353).

With the opening of the long-awaited Alice Springs–Darwin railway line in 2004, the Top End now has its first rail link. Great Southern Railway's ***Ghan*** (✆ **13 21 47** in Australia, or 08/8213 4592; www.trainways.com.au) runs a weekly round-trip between the two cities, leaving Alice Springs on Monday at 4pm and arriving in Darwin about 24 hours later. The return trip leaves Darwin on Wednesday at 10am. The one-way fare is for a "day-nighter" seat is A$240 (US$192) for adults and A$108 (US$86) for children, a sleeper is A$880 (US$704) for adults and A$528 (US$422) for children, and a first-class sleeper is A$1,150 (US$920) for adults and A$782 (US$626) for children.

Darwin is at the end of the Stuart Highway. Allow at least 2 long days, 3 to be comfortable, to drive from Alice. The nearest road from the east is the long and dull Barkly Highway, which connects with the Stuart Highway at Tennant Creek, 922km (572 miles) south. The nearest road from the west is Victoria Highway, which joins the Stuart Highway at Katherine, 314km (195 miles) to the south.

**VISITOR INFORMATION** **Tourism Top End** runs the official visitor center, Knuckey Street (at Mitchell St.), Darwin, NT 0800 (✆ **08/8936 2499;** www.tourismtopend.com.au). It is the place to go for maps, bookings, national park notes, and information on Darwin and other regions throughout the Northern Territory, including Arnhemland, Katherine, and Kakadu and Litchfield national parks. It's open Monday to Friday from 8:30am to 5:45pm, Saturday from 9am to 2:45pm, and Sunday and public holidays from 10am to 1:45pm.

**CITY LAYOUT** The heart of the city is the **Smith Street pedestrian mall.** One street over is the lively **Mitchell Street Tourist Precinct,** full of backpacker lodges, cheap eateries, and souvenir stores. Two streets past that is the harborfront **Esplanade.** In the Old Wharf precinct, near town, are a couple of tourist attractions, a jetty popular with local fishermen, and a working dock. Cullen Bay Marina is a "millionaire's row" of restaurants, cafes, and expensive boats; it's about a 25-minute walk northwest of town. A couple of kilometers northwest of the town center is Fannie Bay, where you'll find the Botanic Gardens, sailing club, golf course, museum and art gallery, and casino.

**GETTING AROUND** For car and four-wheel-drive rentals, call **Avis** (✆ 08/8981 9922), **Budget** (✆ 08/8981 9800), **EuropCar** (✆ 08/8941 0300), **Hertz** (✆ 08/8941 0944), or **Thrifty** (✆ 08/8924 0000).

**Darwinbus** (✆ **08/8924 7666**) is the local bus company. Its 1-day Tourcard allows unlimited travel on the network until midnight for A$5 (US$4) adults, A$2.50 (US$2) kids 5 to 14. The city terminus is on Harry Chan Place (off Smith St., near State Sq.). Get timetables there or from the Tourism Top End visitor center (see "Visitor Information," above).

The **Tour Tub bus** (✆ **08/8985 6322**) does a loop of most city attractions and major hotels between 9am and 4pm daily. Hop on and off as you like all day for A$25 (US$20) for adults, A$15 (US$12) for children 4 to 12. It departs the Knuckey Street end of Smith Street Mall, opposite Woolworths, every hour.

**Darwin Day Tours** (✆ **1300/721 365** in Australia, or 08/8923 6523) has a range of sightseeing tours.

**Darwin Radio Taxis** (✆ **13 10 08** in Australia) is the main cab company. Taxi stands are at the Knuckey Street and Bennett Street ends of Smith Street Mall.

## WHERE TO STAY

Darwin's remoteness means accommodations are not all that cheap, especially from April to October, the peak travel in the Dry season. From November to March, the Wet season, hotels usually drop their rates.

### Mirambeena Tourist Resort

You're just a stone's throw from the city center at this modern hotel complex, where the tempting swimming pools, the Jacuzzis, and the treetop restaurant, all shaded by the leaves of a sprawling strangler fig, have a castaway-island feel. Each room is a decent size and has a garden or pool view. Management will supply a minibar on request. Town houses with kitchenettes are good for families, if you can handle sharing the compact bathroom with your kids.

64 Cavenagh St., Darwin, NT 0800. ✆ **1800/891 100** in Australia, or 08/8946 0111. Fax 08/8981 5116. www.mirambeena.com.au. 225 units (all with shower only). A$157–A$217 (US$126–US$174) double; A$246 (US$197) town house for up to 4. Extra person A$27 (US$22). Children under 3 stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, MC, V. Free limited parking; street parking. Bus: 4, 5, 6, 8, or 10. **Amenities:** Restaurant; poolside cafe; 2 bars; 2 outdoor pools; children's pool; exercise room; 2 Jacuzzis; bike rental; game room; tour desk; secretarial services; limited room service; babysitting; coin-op laundry; laundry service; same-day dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV w/free movies, kitchenette (in town houses), fridge, hair dryer, iron, safe.

### Top End Hotel

This two-story hotel has a quiet ambience, despite the trendy complex of bars, restaurant, sports-betting outlets, and a liquor store on one side. Most of the rooms face a rectangular saltwater swimming pool surrounded by an inviting lawn, sun lounges, and tall palms rather than the bar complex. The front desk sells breakfast and dinner meat packs for you to cook on the barbie. The good-size rooms have

quality fittings and a furnished patio or balcony. You're just across the road from the Esplanade (where fish come into shore at high tide to be hand-fed by visitors), close to restaurants, and a 1km (½-mile) stroll from Smith Street Mall.

Mitchell St. (at Daly St.), Darwin, NT 0801. ✆ **1800/626 151** in Australia, or 08/8981 6511. Fax 08/8941 1253. www.bestwestern.com.au/topend. 40 units (all with shower only). A$136 (US$109) double. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. Bus: 4, 5, 6, 8, or 10. **Amenities:** Restaurant; 3 bars; outdoor saltwater pool; tour desk; room service; babysitting; coin-op laundry; laundry service; same-day dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV w/free movies, fridge, coffeemaker.

**Value Inn** *Value* The cheerful rooms at this neat little hotel in the Mitchell Street Tourist Precinct are compact but tidy, with colorful modern fittings. Each room is just big enough to hold both a queen-size and a single bed, and a small writing table. The views aren't much, but you'll probably spend your time in the nearby cafes. Smith Street Mall and the Esplanade walking path are 2 blocks away. There is a public pay phone, cold drink and coffee vending machines, an iron on each floor, microwave ovens on the first and second floors, and a small swimming pool off the parking lot.

50 Mitchell St., Darwin, NT 0800. ✆ **08/8981 4733.** Fax 08/8981 4730. www.valueinn.com.au. 93 units (all with shower only). A$59–A$99 (US$47–US$79) double. AE, MC, V. Limited free parking. **Amenities:** Outdoor pool; tennis courts; access to nearby golf course and gym; bike rental; tour desk; car-rental desk; coin-op laundry; dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, no phone.

## SUPER-CHEAP SLEEPS

**Darwin City YHA** *Value* Rooms at this upbeat backpacker hostel in the Mitchell Street Tourist Precinct are basic, but the mattresses are firm, and the communal bathrooms are clean. Dorms sleep a maximum of eight, of mixed sexes, or you can choose a single-sex four-share room or your own private double or twin room. Guests laze elbow-to-elbow around the pool; a second lofty sun deck and an open-air kitchen and dining area overlook the pool. The hostel also has TV rooms, a game room, Internet access, and barbecues. Reception is open 24 hours and has safes. Shenanigan's Irish Pub (see "Where to Dine," below) is in the complex, and coach terminals, cheap cafes, the Smith Street Mall, and the Esplanade are steps away.

69 Mitchell St., Darwin, NT 0800. ✆ **08/8981 3995.** Fax 08/8981 6674. www.yha.com.au. 92 units, 2 with bathroom (shower only). A$68 (US$54) double with bathroom; A$53 (US$42) double or twin without bathroom; A$17–A$19 (US$14–US$15) 8-share dorm bed; A$19–A$21 (US$15–US$17) 4-share dorm bed. A$15 (US$12) children under 17 in dorm. Linens A$5 (US$4) for length of stay. MC, V. Ample on-street parking. Bus: 4 or 5 (6 or 10 city-bound only). Free airport shuttle. **Amenities:** Large outdoor pool; game room; tour desk; bike rental; coin-op laundry. *In room:* A/C.

## WHERE TO DINE

**Cullen Bay Marina,** a 25-minute walk from town or a short cab ride, is packed with trendy restaurants and cafes. If it's Thursday, don't even think about eating anywhere other than the **Mindil Beach Sunset Market** ★★, and on Saturdays head to the suburban **Parap Markets** for Asian goodies (see the "Cheap Eats & More!" box below). The cool crowd hangs at **Roma Bar,** 30 Cavenagh St. (✆ **08/8981 6729**), for good coffee and cheap nosh; it's open Monday through Friday from 7am to 5pm, and Saturday and Sunday from 8am to 2pm.

**Hanuman** ★ CONTEMPORARY THAI/NONYA/TANDOORI Elegant black walls and a moody Eastern atmosphere make this city restaurant popular as a business venue by day and as a rendezvous for couples, families, and more business folk by night. You can rely on it for interesting dishes such as roasted duck in a red curry of coconut, fresh pineapple, kaffir lime, and sweet basil; or fish baked whole in banana

## Cheap Eats & More!

If it's Thursday, join the entire city (well, 8,000 locals) at the **Mindil Beach Sunset Market** ★ to feast at the 60 terrific (and cheap—most dishes are A$4–A$6/US$3.20–US$4.80 a serving!) Asian food stalls, listen to live bands, wander 200 art and crafts stalls, and mingle with the masseurs, tarot card readers, and street performers. The action runs from 5 to 10pm in the Dry (May–Oct). A smaller market runs between June and September Sunday from 4 to 9pm. The markets' season changes from year to year, so if you're visiting Darwin on the seasonal cusp in April or September, check whether they have started or ended by calling the organizers (✆ **08/8981 3454**). The beach is about a A$7.50 (US$6) cab ride from town, or take bus no. 4. The Tour Tub's last run of the day, at 4pm (see "Getting Around," above), goes by the markets.

On Saturday mornings, head to suburban **Parap Markets** ★, which transform a small street into a corner of Asia. The focus is on food, and it's a favorite place for locals to have breakfast or brunch, choosing from Southeast Asian soups, noodle dishes, and satays, washed down with fresh-squeezed tropical fruit drinks. The markets are only about a block long, on Parap Road, Parap (✆ **0438/882 373** mobile phone).

leaves, Melaccan-style, with ground galangal, hot chile, lemon grass, and kaffir lime leaves. There is also a separate tandoori menu. Service is prompt and friendly.

28 Mitchell St. ✆ **08/8941 3500.** Reservations recommended. Main courses A$17–A$24 (US$14–US$19). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Fri noon–2:30pm; daily 6:30–11pm.

**Shenanigan's Irish Pub, Restaurant & Bar** ★ IRISH PUB FARE Hearty Irish stews and braised beef–and–Guinness pies (plus the odd pint of Guinness) get everyone in the mood for eating, talking, and dancing at this convivial bar and restaurant. A friendly mix of solo travelers, families, seniors, and backpackers eat and drink in wooden booths, standing up at bar tables, or by the fire. Besides hearty meat dishes, there is lighter stuff like salmon salad and vegetarian brochettes, and nightly specials, such as chicken and chile pasta or poached barramundi in white-wine sauce with fries and salad. Bands play on Wednesday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday nights.

69 Mitchell St. (at Peel St.). ✆ **08/8981 2100.** Reservations recommended. Main courses A$12–A$24 (US$9.60–US$19); daily specials A$9.50–A$14 (US$7.60–US$11). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 10am–2am; Sat–Sun 11am–late.

**Tim's Surf 'n' Turf** ★ *Value* *Kids* STEAK/SEAFOOD Locals fairly bash down the door to get into this unpretentious restaurant under a cheap motel on the city fringe. The surroundings are not the attraction, so what is? Hearty, no-nonsense food cooked well and served in portions big enough to feed an army. No namby-pamby steaks here—Tim's are monsters, up to 700 grams (26 oz.), over an inch thick, and grain-fed (a boon in Australia, where the beef is mostly grass-fed and a little chewy). Garlic prawns, crocodile schnitzel, lasagna, oysters, quiche, and roast of the day are typical menu items. There are meals for kids, who eat free before 6:30pm (one kid for each adult in the party). You'll get a complimentary port after dinner and free ice cream for dessert.

In the Asti Motel, Smith St. (at Packard Place). ✆ **08/8981 9979.** Main courses A$7–A$21 (US$5.60–US$17), many dishes around A$12 (US$9.60); seafood platter for 2 A$35 (US$28); crocodile from A$13 (US$10). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 7–9am, noon–2pm, and 5:30–9:30pm. Bus: 4 or 6; bus stop within 100m (328 ft.).

### WORTH A SPLURGE

**Buzz Café** ★★ MODERN AUSTRALIAN This smart, busy waterfront cafe is as well known for its "loo with a view" as it is for its terrific food and relaxed atmosphere. The men's bathroom just nudges out the women's for interest value. Ladies, get a man to take you in there to see what I mean—everybody does! The food is East-meets-West fare like jungle curry of chicken with snake beans and green peppercorns, and pan-fried barramundi on potato mash in lemon-butter sauce; the lamb shanks are so huge almost no one can finish them. Wash it down with a cocktail.

The Slipway, Cullen Bay Marina. ✆ **08/8941 1141.** Reservations recommended in the Dry (May–Oct). Main courses A$17–A$30 (US$14–US$24). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Fri noon–2am; Sat–Sun 10:30am–2am (brunch until 11:30am). Bus: 4 or 6.

## WHAT TO SEE & DO: CITY STROLLS, WORLD WAR II HISTORY, FISHING & MORE

Darwin's ample parks, stunning harbor, and tropical clime make it a lovely city for strolling during the Dry. The Tourism Top End (see "Visitor Information," above) has a free map of a historical stroll that takes you to 17 points of interest around town; the Esplanade makes a pleasantly short and shady saunter; and the **George Brown Darwin Botanic Gardens** (✆ **08/8981 1958**), on Gardens Road 1.5 kilometers (1 mile) from town, has paths through palms, orchids, and lawns, and an Aboriginal plant use trail. Admission is free, and it's open daily. Take bus no. 4 or 6.

The long but pleasant 5km (3-mile) trail along **Fannie Bay** from Skycity Darwin hotel and casino to the **East Point Military Museum** is worth doing. Keep a lookout for the 2,000 wild wallabies on the east side of Alec Fong Lim Drive near the museum.

Darwin has two wildlife parks worth visiting. At the **Territory Wildlife Park** (✆ **08/8988 7200;** www.territorywildlifepark.com.au), 61km (38 miles) south of Darwin at Berry Springs, you can take a free shuttle or walk 6km (3.75 miles) of bush trails to see Northern Territory wildlife in re-created natural habitats, including monsoon rainforest boardwalks, lagoons with hides (shelters for watching birds), a walk-through aviary, a walk-through aquarium housing sting rays and sawfish, and a nocturnal house with marsupials such as the bilby. Bats, birds, spiders, crocs, frill-neck lizards, kangaroos, and other creatures also make their homes here (but not koalas because they don't live in the territory). A program of animal talks runs throughout the day. The best is the birds-of-prey show, at 10am and 3pm. Go first thing to see the animals at their liveliest, and allow 4 hours to see everything, plus 45 minutes' traveling time. Open daily from 8:30am to 6pm (last entry at 4pm), and closed December 25. Admission is A$18 (US$14) for adults, A$9 (US$7.20) for students and children 5 to 16, and A$40 (US$32) for families of six. Take the Stuart Highway for 50km (31 miles) and turn right onto the Cox Peninsula Road for another 11km (7 miles).

In addition to housing a small crocodile museum, **Crocodylus Park** (✆ **08/8922 4500**), a 15-minute drive from town at 815 McMillan's Rd., Berrimah (opposite the police station), holds croc-feeding sessions and free hour-long guided tours at 10am, noon, and 2pm. It doubles as Darwin's zoo, with exotic species including lions, Bengal tigers, leopards, and monkeys on display. It's open daily from 9am to 5pm (closed Dec 25). Admission is A$25 (US$20) for adults, A$20 (US$16) for seniors, A$13

(US$10) for children 3 to 15, and A$65 (US$52) for families. Bus no. 5 (Mon–Fri only) from Darwin will drop you about a 5-minute walk from the park entrance.

The **Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory,** Conacher Street, Bullocky Point (✆ **08/8999 8201**), also holds an attraction for crocodile fans—the preserved body of **Sweetheart,** a 5m (16-ft.) man-eating saltwater croc captured in Kakadu National Park. The museum and gallery have good sections on Aboriginal, Southeast Asian, and Pacific art and culture, and a maritime gallery with a pearling lugger and other boats that have sailed into Darwin from Indonesia and other places. A highlight is the Cyclone Tracy gallery. The gallery and museum are open Monday through Friday 9am to 5pm, and weekends and public holidays 10am to 5pm; closed January 1, Good Friday, and December 25 and 26. Admission is free to the permanent exhibits. Take bus no. 4 or 6.

Darwin was bombed 64 times during World War II, and 12 ships were sunk in the harbor. The **East Point Military Museum,** East Point Road, East Point (✆ **08/8981 9702;** www.epmm.com.au), housed in a World War II gun command post, plays a video of the 1942 and 1943 Japanese bombings. It has small but fine displays of photos, memorabilia, artillery, armored vehicles, weaponry old and new, and gun emplacements outside. Open daily from 9:30am to 5pm (closed Good Friday and Dec 25). Admission is A$10 (US$8) adults, A$9 (US$7.20) seniors, A$5 (US$4) children, and A$28 (US$22) families.

Military or aircraft buffs should not miss the **Australian Aviation Heritage Centre** ★, 557 Stuart Hwy., Winnellie (✆ **08/8947 2145**). A B-52 bomber on loan from the United States is the prized exhibit, but the center also boasts a B-25 Mitchell bomber, Mirage and Sabre jet fighters, rare Japanese Zero fighter wreckage, and displays on World War II and Vietnam. Hours are daily from 9am to 5pm (closed Good Friday and Dec 25). Admission is A$11 (US$8.80) for adults, A$8 (US$6.40) for seniors and students, A$6 (US$4.80) for children 6 to 12, and A$28 (US$22) for families. Guided tours are at 10am, 2, and 4pm. The Heritage Centre is 10 minutes from town; take the no. 5 or 8 bus. Empty **World War II oil storage tunnels** (✆ **08/8985 6333**), on Kitchener Drive in the Wharf Precinct, house a collection of black-and-white photographs of the war in Darwin, each lit up in the dark. The simple but haunting attraction is worth a visit. Admission is A$4.50 (US$3.60) per person. The tunnels are closed in February. They open May through September daily from 9am to 4pm; October through April, hours are Tuesday through Friday from 10am to 2pm, weekends and holidays from 10am to 4pm.

On the Esplanade stands a monument to the destroyer **USS *Robert E. Peary,*** which went down in Darwin Harbour, with a loss of 88 lives.

### *Tips* The Darwin Shopping Scene

Darwin's best buys are Aboriginal art and crafts, pearls, opals, and diamonds. For a great range of artworks and artifacts, check out **Raintree Aboriginal Fine Arts,** 20 Knuckey St. (✆ **08/8941 2732**). The world's best South Sea pearls are farmed in Top End seas. Buy, or just drool in the window, at **Paspaley Pearls,** off Smith Street Mall in Bennett Street (✆ **08/8982 5515**). **The World of Opal,** 44 Smith Street Mall (✆ **08/8981 8981**), has a re-creation of an opal mine in their showroom.

### Tips Where Can I Take a Dip?

Crocodiles and stingers render Darwin's lovely turquoise seas a no-swim zone year-round. Locals swim within view of the sea in **Lake Alexander** on Alec Fong Lim Drive in East Point Reserve. It's that, or hit the hotel pool!

For an insight into Darwin's pearling industry, visit the **Australian Pearling Exhibition** (✆ **08/8999 6573**), on Kitchener Drive near the Wharf Precinct. It has displays following the industry from the days of the lugger and hard-hat diving to modern farming and culture techniques. It's open daily from 10am to 5pm, except January 1, Good Friday, and December 25 and 26. Tickets cost A$6.60 (US$5.30) for adults, A$3.30 (US$2.65) for children, and A$17 (US$14) for families of five. If you have an evening free, get out on the harbor. **Australian Harbour Cruises** (✆ **08/8941 4000;** www.australianharbourcruises.com.au) offers 3-hour sunset cruises aboard the restored pearling lugger *Anniki.* They leave Cullen Bay Marina daily at 5pm and cost A$50 (US$40) for adults and A$30 (US$24) for kids 3 to 15. The price includes a glass of bubbly and some nibbles, and you can buy more drinks.

The Top End's wetlands and warm oceans are **fishing** heaven. The big prey is barramundi, or "barra." Loads of charter boats conduct jaunts of up to 10 days in the river and wetland systems around Darwin, Kakadu National Park, and into Arnhemland. The same company that runs Darwin's Tour Tub bus runs the **Northern Territory Fishing Office** (✆ **08/8985 6333;** www.ntfishingoffice.com.au), a booking agent for a number of fishing charter boats offering barramundi day trips and wetland safaris, reef fishing, light-tackle sportfishing, fly-fishing, and estuary fishing. A day's barra fishing on wetlands near Darwin will cost around A$250 (US$200) per person; for an extended barra safari, budget about A$420 (US$336) per person per day. If you simply want to cast a line in Darwin Harbour for *trevally,* queenfish, and barra, the company will take you out for A$75 (US$60) per person for a half-day, or A$135 (US$108) per person for a full day. It also rents skipper-yourself fishing boats and tackle. Check out Northern Territory Tourist Commission's fishing website, at www.fishingtheterritory.com, for detailed information on fishing tours, guides, and everything you need to know to make your arms ache from reeling 'em in!

## DARWIN AFTER DARK

If it's Thursday, you are mad to be anywhere except the Mindil Beach Sunset Market (described above). If it's Sunday evening, head to the A$10 (US$8) **Sunset Jazz** on the lawns at the Skycity Darwin Casino, Gilruth Avenue (✆ **08/8943 8777;** www.skycity darwin.com.au), held once a month from May to August. There are other concerts too, but ticket prices can be higher for those. A good spot to catch Darwin's movie-set sunsets any night is the super-casual **Darwin Sailing Club,** Atkins Drive on Fannie Bay (✆ **08/8981 1700**). Ask the manager to sign you in. A bistro serves affordable meals daily from noon to 2pm and from 6 to 9pm, and the bar is open Sunday to Thursday from 10am until midnight, and until 2am Friday and Saturday.

Lie back in a deck chair at the **Deckchair Cinema** (✆ **08/8981 0700;** www. deckchaircinema.com) to watch Aussie hits, foreign films, and cult classics under the stars. Movies are screened daily at 7:30pm in the Dry (Apr or May–Oct or Nov) with double features Friday and Saturday nights. It is on the beachfront opposite Parliament

House on the Esplanade. Tickets are A$13 (US$10) adults, A$6 (US$4.80) children, and A$30 (US$24) families of four. Double features cost A$20 (US$16) adults, A$9 (US$7.20) children, and A$45 (US$36) families of four. It's cash only, and no bookings are taken. (In the Wet, the movies screen indoors, so call for details of the current venue.)

**Darwin Entertainment Centre,** 93 Mitchell St. (✆ **08/8980 3366** administration, or 08/8980 3333 box office) is the city's main performing arts venue.

The gaming tables at the **Skycity Darwin Casino,** Gilruth Avenue, Mindil Beach (✆ **08/8943 8888**), are in play from noon until 4am Sunday to Thursday, until 6am Friday and Saturday. Slot machines operate 24 hours. The dress code allows neat jeans, shorts, and sneakers, but men's shirts must have a collar.

### PUBS, CLUBS & LIVE MUSIC

The cafes and restaurants of Cullen Bay Marina are a good place to be, day or night, but especially for Dry season sunsets. On most nights, **Shenannigan's Irish Pub,** 69 Mitchell St. at Peel Street (✆ **08/8981 2100**), has that wonderful mix of live Irish music, dancing, blarney, and laughter called "craik," oiled by ample Guinness. When the U.S. Marines are in town, they head to **Rorke's Drift,** 46 Mitchell St. (✆ **08/8941 7171**), an English-style pub and cafe, which offers karaoke on Wednesday nights, "male entertainers" (*read:* male strippers) on Thursdays ("ladies' night"), and live music most other nights. The stylish complex of pool bar, DJ, beer garden, grill, sports bar, and upscale restaurant that is the **Top End Hotel,** Mitchell Street at Daly Street (✆ **08/8981 6511**), has something to suit just about everyone.

## A SIDE TRIP TO LITCHFIELD NATIONAL PARK

120km (75 miles) S of Darwin

A 90-minute drive south of Darwin is a miniature Garden of Eden full of monsoonal forests, waterfalls, rocky sandstone escarpments, natural swimming holes, and prehistoric cycads that look like they belong on the set of Jurassic Park. **Litchfield National Park** ★★★ is much smaller (a mere 146,000 hectares/360,620 acres) and less famous than Kakadu, but is no less stunning.

The park's main attractions are the spring-fed swimming holes, like the magical plunge pool at **Florence Falls** ★★★, 29km (18 miles) from the forest. It's a 15-minute hike down stairs to the water, so the easily accessible pool at **Wangi Falls** ★, 49km (30 miles) from the eastern entrance, gets more crowds. (It's a beautiful spot, surrounded by cliffs and forests with a lookout from the top.) More idyllic grottos are 4km (2½ miles) from Florence Falls at **Buley Rockhole,** a series of tiered rock pools and waterfalls. You can't swim at Tolmer Falls, but during the Wet when they're flowing, take the boardwalk about 400m (1,312 ft.) to the lookout and see the cascade against a backdrop of red cliffs.

There are a number of short walking trails through the park, too, such as the half-hour Shady Creek Circuit from Florence Falls up to the parking lot.

Parts of the park are also home to thousands of 2m (6½-ft.) high **"magnetic" termite mounds,** so called because they run north-south to escape the fierce midday heat. There is a display hut and a viewing point 17km (11 miles) from the park's eastern entrance.

***Note:*** Most of the park's swimming holes are regarded as crocodile-free; the same is *not* true of the Finniss and Reynolds rivers, so no leaping into those!

### ESSENTIALS

**GETTING THERE** From Darwin, head south for just over 86km (54 miles) on the Stuart Highway and follow the park turnoff on the right through the town of Batchelor for 34km (21 miles). A number of minibus and 4WD day trips run from Darwin. Katherine-based tour operator **Travel North** (✆ **1800/089 103** in Australia, or 08/8971 9999) runs a day tour to Litchfield that starts in Darwin and ends in Katherine, a convenient way to combine sightseeing and transport if you plan to visit both. It costs A$139 (US$111) adults and A$114 (US$91) children ages 5 to 15.

**VISITOR INFORMATION** **The Parks & Wildlife Commission** district office in Batchelor on the corner of Nurdina Street and Pinaroo Crescent (✆ **08/8987 8986**) has maps and information; most locations of interest have signboards. Admission is free.

**GETTING AROUND** Roads to most water holes in the park are paved, although a few areas are only accessible by 4WD. In the Wet season (approximately Nov–Apr), some roads in the park may be closed, usually the 4WD ones, and the Wangi water hole may be off limits due to turbulence and strong currents. Check with the Parks & Wildlife Commission office before you leave Darwin during this time.

**CAMPING** There are basic campsites with toilets, showers, and wood-fired barbecues at Florence Falls and Wangi Falls, plus several other sites with fewer facilities throughout the park. You may collect firewood in the park, but not around the campgrounds. The camping fee is A$6.60 (US$5.30) for adults, A$3.30 (US$2.65) for kids under 16, and A$15 (US$12) for families. A kiosk at Wangi Falls sells basic supplies, but stock up on fuel and alcohol in Batchelor.

### A SIDE TRIP TO THE TIWI ISLANDS

Separated from the mainland by a narrow strait are the Tiwi Islands, Bathurst and Melville. The Tiwi people have a separate culture from that of the Aborigines, and one of the reasons to visit is to see first-hand their distinctive art style. **Tiwi Tours** (✆ **08/8924 1111**) take small groups on 1- and 2-day tours to Bathurst Island (Melville Island is closed to the public). Tours include visits to two art centers where you can watch artists at work and buy their paintings, carvings, silk-screen printing, and basketwork at "island prices"—usually up to a third cheaper than in Darwin. You will learn the history of the islands, have morning tea with some Tiwi women and see them making baskets, and visit a mock burial site. The 2-day tour includes overnight camping. There are no commercial accommodations on the island, and the 1-day tour probably satisfies most. The 1-day tour costs A$325 (US$260) adults and A$275 (US$220) children; the 2-day tour is A$574 (US$459) adults and A$500 (US$400) children. Both include the round-trip light plane airfare from Darwin (it's about a 30-min. flight) and meals. Tours operate Monday to Friday, except public holidays.

## 2 Kakadu National Park ★★★

257km (161 miles) E of Darwin

**Kakadu National Park,** a World Heritage area, is Australia's largest national park, covering a massive 1,755,200 hectares (4,335,344 acres).

Cruising the lily-clad wetlands to spot crocodiles, swimming in exquisite natural water holes, hiking through spear grass and cycads, fishing for barramundi, soaring in a light aircraft over torrential waterfalls during the Wet, photographing the millions

of birds and thousands of saltwater crocodiles that live here, flying over the somehow eerie red-sandstone escarpment that juts 200m (650 ft.) above the floodplain, and admiring Aboriginal rock art sites—these activities are what draw people to Kakadu. Some 275 species of birds and 75 species of reptiles inhabit the park, making it one of the richest wildlife habitats.

The name "Kakadu" comes from "Gagudju," the group of languages spoken in the northern part of the park. It is thought that Aboriginal people have lived in this part of the world for 50,000 years. Today, Aborigines manage the park as its owners in conjunction with the Australian government. This is one of the few places in Australia where some Aborigines stick to a traditional lifestyle of hunting and living off the land. They keep away from prying eyes, but their culture is on display at a cultural center and at rock art sites. Kakadu and the vast wilds of Arnhemland to the east are the birthplace of the "x-ray" style of art for which Aboriginal artists are famous.

Kakadu is an ecological jewel. But be aware that the vast distances between points of interest in the park and that sameness that infects so much Australian landscape can detract from Kakadu's appeal for some people.

There is a uranium mine within the park boundaries, which many believe threatens the park and its World Heritage listing. But don't think the mine will have an impact on your experience of the place. It is a pinprick on Kakadu's sweeping landscape.

## JUST THE FACTS

**VISITOR INFORMATION** Both of the park's entrances—the northern one on the Arnhem Highway used by visitors from Darwin and the southern on the Kakadu Highway for visitors from Katherine—hand out free visitor guides with maps, and in the Dry they issue a timetable of free guided ranger walks, talks, and slide shows taking place that week. Admission to the Park is free.

Park headquarters is at the **Bowali Visitor Centre** (✆ **08/8938 1120**) on the Kakadu Highway, 5km (3 miles) from Jabiru, 100km (63 miles) from the northern entry station, and 131km (82 miles) from the southern entry station. This environmentally friendly Outback-style center shows videos on the park's natural history and Aboriginal culture, has maps and free park notes, a library and displays, and information officers. There is a gift shop and a cafe, open daily from 8am to 5pm.

You can also book tours and get information at the **Jabiru Travel Centre,** Shop 6, Tasman Plaza, Jabiru, NT 0886 (✆ **08/8979 25480**).

Before you arrive, you can find information on Kakadu, and book tours to it, at the Tourism Top End visitor information center in Darwin. You can also contact the **rangers** at Kakadu National Park (✆ **08/8938 1120;** www.deh.gov.au/parks/kakadu).

**WHEN TO GO** Kakadu has two distinct seasons—Wet and Dry. The Dry season from May to October is overwhelmingly the best time to go, thanks to equable temperatures around 86°F (30°C) and sunny days. Many tours, park hotels, and even campsites are booked a year in advance; so don't travel without reservations. In the Wet season, from November through April, floodwaters cover much of the park, some attractions are cut off unexpectedly, and the heat and humidity are extreme. Some tour companies do not run during the Wet, and ranger talks, walks, and slide shows are not offered. The upside of visiting during the Wet is that the crowds vanish, the brownish vegetation bursts into green, waterfalls swell from a trickle to a roar, and lightning storms are spectacular, especially in the very hot build-up to the season in October and November. The landscape can change dramatically from one day to the

next as floodwaters rise and fall, so be prepared for surprises, both nice ones—like giant flocks of geese that are here today, gone tomorrow—and unwelcome ones, like blocked roads. Although it sometimes pours down all day, it is more common for the rain to fall in late afternoon storms and at night. Take it easy in the humidity and don't even think about camping in this heat—stay in air-conditioned accommodations.

**GETTING THERE** Follow the Stuart Highway 34km (21 miles) south of Darwin, turn left onto the Arnhem Highway all the way to the park's northern entrance station. The trip takes 2½ to 3 hours. If you're coming from the south, turn off the Stuart Highway at Pine Creek onto the Kakadu Highway and follow the Kakadu Highway for 79km (49 miles) to the park's southern entrance. **Greyhound Australia** (✆ **13 14 99** in Australia, or 07/4690 9950) travels daily (subject to seasonal and road conditions) from Darwin, stopping at Jabiru and Cooinda, for A$56 (US$45) round-trip.

A big range of coach, minibus, and 4WD tours and camping safaris taking an average of 1 to 3 days depart from Darwin every day. These are a good idea because many of Kakadu's geological, ecological, and Aboriginal attractions only come to life with a guide, and the best water holes, lookouts, and wildlife-viewing spots change dramatically from month to month, or even from day to day.

**TIPS FOR EXPLORING** Kakadu is a big place—about 200km (125 miles) long by 100km (63 miles) wide—so plan to spend a couple of nights here. It is really too far and too big to see much in a day from Darwin.

Most attractions are accessible in a conventional vehicle on sealed (paved) roads, but a 4WD vehicle allows you to get to more falls, water holes, and campsites. **Thrifty** (✆ **08/8979 2552**) rents cars at the Gagadju Crocodile Holiday Inn, Flinders Street, Jabiru; otherwise, rent a car in Darwin. If you 4WD it, always check the road conditions at the **Bowali Visitor Centre** (✆ **08/8938 1120**). In the Wet season (late Nov to Apr), call daily to check floodwater levels on all roads, paved and unpaved. The Bowali Visitor Centre, attractions such as Nourlangie and Yellow Water Billabong, and the towns of Jabiru and Cooinda, stay above the floodwaters year-round.

Facilities are limited in Kakadu. The only town of any size is **Jabiru** (pop. 1,455), a mining community where you can find a bank. The only other real settlements are accommodations (see "Where to Stay & Dine," below).

## WHERE TO STAY & DINE

There are few options to stay in Kakadu, and prices aren't cheap, especially in the high season (usually Apr–Nov).

**Aurora Kakadu** This property is near the northern entrance to the park. The downside is that these are the farthest accommodations from major attractions like Yellow Waters and Nourlangie, although many tour operators pick up here. The upside is that the resort's green lawns and tropical gardens adorned with wandering peacocks and goannas and chattering native birds are a wonderfully restful haven from the harsh surrounds of Kakadu outside. Don't yield to the temptation to dive into the lily-filled lagoon down the back—like every other waterway in Kakadu, it is home to saltwater crocs! A 3.6km (2-mile) nature trail winds from the hotel through monsoon forest and past a billabong. All but the end rooms of the neatly decorated motel-style accommodations have pitched timber ceilings, and all have restful views from a balcony or patio. Budget rooms have two sets of bunks. All rooms are nonsmoking. Hair dryers are free at reception, and there are barbecues on the grounds. Keep an eye out for regular special deals on offer. There are also 60 unpowered campsites.

## Never Smile at a You-Know-What

The Aboriginal Gagudju people of the Top End have long worshipped a giant crocodile called Ginga, but the way white Australians go on about these reptilian relics of a primeval age, you'd think they worshipped them, too. There is scarcely a soul in the Northern Territory who will not regale you with his or her personal croc story, and each one you hear will be more outrageous than the last.

Aussies may be good at pulling your leg, but when they warn you not to swim in crocodile country, they are deadly serious. Crocodiles are good at pulling your leg, too—literally. To be sure you don't end up as lunch, here are some tips:

1. There are two kinds of crocs in Australia, the highly dangerous and enormously powerful saltwater or "estuarine" kind, and the "harmless" freshwater kind, which will only attack if threatened or accidentally stood on. Saltwater crocs can and do swim in the ocean, but they live in freshwater.
2. Don't swim in any waterway, swimming hole, or waterfall unless someone authoritative like a park ranger has specifically told you that it is safe. You can never be sure where crocodiles lurk from year to year because, every Wet season, crocs head upriver to breed and spread out over a wide flooded area. As the floodwaters subside, they are trapped in whatever waterway they happen to be in at the time—so what was a safe swimming hole last Dry season might not be croc-free this year.
3. Never stand on or walk along a riverbank; stand well back when fishing. A 6m (20-ft.) croc can be an inch under the surface of that muddy water, yet remain invisible. They move so fast you won't see them until you're in their jaws.
4. Make camp and clean fish at least 25m (82 ft.) back from the bank.

And if you do come face-to-face with a crocodile? Everyone has different advice, but it all boils down to two things: Make your peace with God or run!

Arnhem Hwy., South Alligator (41km/25 miles west of Bowali Visitor Centre), Kakadu National Park, NT 0886. ✆ **1800/818 845** in Australia, or 08/8979 0166. Fax 08/8979 0147. www.aurora-resorts.com.au. 138 units. High season A$203 (US$162) double; low season A$142 (US$114) double. Extra person A$40 (US$32). Children under 14 stay free when sharing with 2 adults. Free crib. Budget rooms A$100 (US$80) for private use or A$25 (US$20) per person for 4 (shared by gender). Family rooms double rate plus A$80 (US$64). AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; cafe; bar; shaded outdoor pool; day/night tennis court; Jacuzzi; tour desk; coin-op laundry; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, coffeemaker.

**Gagudju Lodge Cooinda** This modest but pleasant lodge set among tropical gardens is at the departure point for Yellow Water Billabong cruises. The simply furnished tile-floor bungalows are big and comfortable. They're air-conditioned, with ceiling fans, TVs, fridges, coffeemakers, and irons. You can request a hair dryer. Budget rooms are just bunk beds (four have double beds) in an air-conditioned corrugated iron demountable, or portable cabin, with shared bathrooms. They rent on a per-bed

basis, so you may have to share with a stranger. The lodge is something of a town center, with a general store, gift shop, currency exchange, post office, fuel, and other useful facilities. Cook up a 'roo steak at the nightly do-it-yourself barbecue in the rustic and ultracasual **Barra Bar & Bistro,** or go for the bush tucker a la carte meals at lunch or dinner in **Mimi's** ★, which has a nice "bush sophisticated" ambience. The Barra Bistro serves a full buffet breakfast and an all-day snack menu, with live entertainment in the Dry season. All the restaurants have been given a A$2.5-million (US$2-million) facelift in 2005, with the addition of an Internet cafe. Scenic flights take off from the lodge's airstrip, and the Warradjan Aboriginal Cultural Centre is a 15-minute walk away.

Kakadu Hwy. (50km/31 miles south of Bowali Visitor Centre), Jim Jim, NT 0886. ✆ **1800/500 401** in Australia, 800/835-7742 in the U.S. and Canada, 0800/897 121 in the U.K., 1800/553 155 in Ireland, 0800/801 111 in New Zealand, or 08/8979 0145. Fax 08/8979 0148. www.gagudjulodgecooinda.com.au. 48 bungalows (all with shower only), 24 budget rooms (none with bathroom), 80 powered and 300 unpowered campsites. Lodge A$198 (US$158) double. Extra person A$28 (US$22). Children under 14 stay free. Free cots. Budget rooms A$31 (US$25) per bed. Campsites A$13 (US$10) adults, powered; A$10 (US$8) adults, unpowered. Children under 14 stay free in campsites. Bungalow and budget room discounts often available in Wet season. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; outdoor pool; tour desk; babysitting; coin-op laundry. *In room (bungalows only):* A/C, TV, fridge, coffeemaker, iron.

**Kakadu Lodge & Caravan Park** Within walking distance of Jabiru and 2km (1¼ mile) from the Bowali Visitor Centre, this lodge offers simple air-conditioned cabins with either private or shared facilities. The 12 one-bedroom cabins sleep up to five, and three 2-bedroom cabins sleep up to seven. All have their own kitchenette. The 28 lodge rooms sleep four and have a minifridge and self-serve tea and coffee, but you must use a communal bathroom and kitchen. There are also four quad-share rooms. There are barbecues in the attractive gardens. No smoking in cabins or bunkrooms. Or you can camp at one of the powered or non-powered caravan and camping sites.

Jabiru Dr., Kakadu National Park, NT 0886. ✆ **1800/811 154** in Australia, or 08/8979 2422. Fax 08/8979 2254. www.aurora-resorts.com.au. 59 units, 32 with no bathroom (13 with shower only); 186 powered and 100 unpowered campsites. High season A$131–A$192 (US$105–US$154) 1-bedroom cabins; A$163–A$231 (US$130–US$185) 2-bedroom cabins; A$127 (US$102) lodge room; A$20 (US$16) unpowered campsite double; A$25 (US$20) powered campsite double. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. Coach station 100m (328 ft.). **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor pool; Jacuzzi; tour desk; coin-op laundry. *In room:* A/C, TV (in cabins), kitchenette (in cabins), fridge, coffeemaker.

## SEEING THE HIGHLIGHTS

### EN ROUTE TO KAKADU

En route to the park, stop in at the **Fogg Dam Conservation Reserve** (✆ **08/8988 8009** ranger station), 25km (16 miles) down the Arnhem Highway plus 10km (6 miles) off the highway. Here you'll get a close-up look at geese, egrets, ibis, *brolgas,* and other wetland birds from boardwalks leading through monsoon forests to raised lookouts. Admission is free every day of the year.

Four kilometers (2½ miles) down the Arnhem Highway at Beatrice Hill, you may want to call in on the **Window on the Wetlands Visitor Centre** (✆ **08/8988 8188**), a hilltop center with views across the Adelaide River floodplain and touchscreen information on the wetlands' ecology. It's free and open daily from 7:30am to 7:30pm.

Just past Beatrice Hill on the highway at the Adelaide River Bridge (look out for the statue of a grinning croc), **Adelaide River Queen Cruises** (✆ **1800/888 542** in Australia, or 08/8988 8144) runs the original **jumping crocodiles cruise.** From the relative safety of a restored paddle steamer, you can watch wild crocodiles leap out of the water for hunks of meat dangled over the edge by the boat crew—but don't lean out too far! It's an unabashed tourist trap, with a souvenir shop that sells all things

croc, including crocodile toilet seat covers. It may not be to my—or your—taste, but because crocs typically move fast only when they attack, it may be your only chance to witness their immense power and speed. The 90-minute cruise departs May through August at 9, 11am, 1, and 3pm, and September through April at 9, 11am, and 2:30pm (closed Dec 24–25). The cruise costs A$36 (US$29) for adults, A$32 (US$26) for seniors, and A$20 (US$16) for children 5 to 15.

## TOP PARK ATTRACTIONS

**WETLANDS CRUISES** One of the biggest attractions in the park is **Yellow Water Billabong** ★★, a lush lake 50km (31 miles) south of the Bowali Visitor Centre at Cooinda (pop. 20). It's rich with freshwater mangroves, paperbarks, pandanus palms, water lilies, and marvelous swathes of thousands of birds gathering here to drink—sea eagles, honking magpie geese, kites, china blue kingfishers, and jacanas, called "Jesus birds" because they seem to walk on water as they step nimbly across the lily pads. This is also one of the best places to spot saltwater crocs. Cruises in canopied boats with a running commentary depart near Gagudju Lodge Cooinda six times a day from 6:45am in the Dry (Apr–Nov) and four times a day from 8:30am in the Wet (Dec–Mar). A 90-minute cruise costs A$40 (US$32) for adults and A$15 (US$12) for children 2 to 14. A 2-hour cruise (available in the Dry only) costs A$45 (US$36) for adults and A$17 (US$14) for children. Book through **Gagudju Lodge Cooinda** (✆ **08/8979 0145**). Even though it means spending the night in the park and getting up before dawn, the sunrise cruise is especially good, when the dawn silence is broken by an overture that builds to a full-blown orchestral performance, courtesy of the birds. In the Wet, when the billabong floods to join up with Jim Jim Creek and the South Alligator River, the bird life spreads far and wide and the crocs head upriver to breed, so don't expect wildlife viewing to be spectacular.

Another good cruise is the **Guluyambi East Alligator River Cruise** (✆ **1800/089 113** in Australia, or 08/8979 2411). The East Alligator River forms the border between Kakadu and isolated Arnhemland, and unlike the Yellow Water cruise, which focuses on crocs, birds, and plants, on this you will learn about Aboriginal myths, bush tucker, and hunting techniques. The cruise lasts 1 hour, starting May through October daily at 9, 11am, 1, and 3pm. A free shuttle will take you from the Border Store to the boat ramp. It costs A$30 (US$24) for adults and A$15 (US$12) for children 4 to 14.

**ABORIGINAL ART & CULTURE** There are as many as 5,000 art sites throughout the park, of which the Aboriginal owners make a few accessible to visitors. The two best are **Nourlangie Rock** and **Ubirr Rock** ★★★. Nourlangie, 31km (19 miles) southeast of the Bowali Visitor Centre, features "X-ray" style paintings of animals and a vivid striped Dreamtime figure of Namarrgon, the "Lightning Man," alongside more recent depictions of a white man in cowboy boots, a rifle, and a sailing ship. You'll also find rock paintings at Nanguluwur, near Nourlangie, and at Ubirr Rock, which is worth the 250m (800-ft.) steep climb for the great views of the floodplain at sunset. Access to Ubirr can be limited in the Wet, but the views of afternoon fork lightning storms up here at that time are breathtaking. Unlike most sites in Kakadu, Ubirr is not open 24 hours—it opens April through November at 8:30am and December through March at 2pm, and closes at sunset. There is a 1.5km (1-mile) signposted trail past Nourlangie's paintings (short trails into the art sites shoot off it), an easy 1.7km (1-mile) trail from the parking lot into Nanguluwur, and a 1km (.5-mile) circuit at Ubirr. Access to the sites is free.

Displays and videos of the bush tucker, Dreamtime creation myths, and lifestyles of the local Bininj Aborigines are on show at the **Warradjan Aboriginal Cultural Centre** ★ (✆ **08/8979 0051**) at Cooinda. This building was built in the shape of a pig-nose turtle at the direction of the Aboriginal owners. A quality gift shop sells items like didgeridoos, bark paintings by local artists, and baskets woven from pandanus fronds. The center is open daily from 9am to 5pm, and admission is free. It is connected to Gagudju Lodge Cooinda and the Yellow Water Billabong by a 1km (.5-mile) long trail.

## SWIMMING, FISHING & BUSHWALKING

In the eastern section of the park rises a massive red-sandstone escarpment that sets the stage for two waterfalls, **Jim Jim Falls** and **Twin Falls.** In the Dry, the volume of water may not be all that impressive, but the settings are magical. Both are accessible by four-wheel-drive only, and neither is open in the Wet. At Twin Falls, you must swim or float the last 500m (1,640 ft.) to the base of the falls—and be warned that saltwater crocodiles have been found in this area.

A 1km (½-mile) walk over rocks and through rainforest leads to a deep green plunge pool at Jim Jim Falls, 103km (64 miles) from the Bowali Visitor Centre. The water is wrapped by an almost perfectly circular 150m (490-ft.) cliff. Allow 2 hours to drive the final 60 unpaved kilometers (38 miles) off the highway. Due to floodwaters, Jim Jim Falls may not open until as late as June.

The falls descend into a natural pool edged by a sandy beach and surrounded by bush and high cliffs. **Kakadu Gorge and Waterfall Tours** ★ (book through Gagudju Lodge Cooinda; ✆ **08/8979 0145**) run an excellent small-group day trip for active people. You bushwalk into Jim Jim Falls for a swim and morning tea, 4WD through the bush, and then paddle a canoe to Twin Falls for lunch. Tours depart daily from Jabiru and Cooinda May through November and cost A$135 (US$108) for adults, A$115 (US$92) for kids 4 to 14 (no kids under 4 allowed). Book in advance for July, the busiest month.

Remember the idyllic pool that Paul Hogan and Linda Koslowski plunged into in the movie *Crocodile Dundee?* That was **Gunlom Falls,** about 170km (106 miles) south of the Bowali Visitor Centre. A climb to the top of the falls rewards you with great views of southern Kakadu. Access is by 4WD and can be cut off in the Wet.

Kakadu's wetlands are brimful of barramundi, and there is nothing Territorians like more than to hop in a tin dinghy barely big enough to resist a croc attack and look for them. **Kakadu Fishing Tours** (book through **Gagudju Lodge Cooinda;** ✆ **08/8979 0145**) takes you fishing in a 5m (17-ft.) sportfishing boat. Tours depart from

### Tips Glowing Attraction?

Not all of Kakadu's attractions are natural. Tours of the **Ranger Uranium Mine,** 13km (8 miles) east of the Bowali Visitor Centre, reveal how this extremely controversial material is extracted from a large open-cut mine and turned into yellowcake to fire nuclear power plants around the world. Ninety-minute tours depart May through October daily at 10:30am and 1:30pm and cost A$25 (US$20) adults, A$10 (US$8) kids ages 4 to 14. The tours depart by bus from Jabiru Airport, which is near the mine. Book through **Kakadu Tours** (✆ **1800/089 113** in Australia, or 08/8979 2411).

**Tips Croc Alert!**

Though folk do swim at Jim Jim, Twin Falls, and other water holes, such as Gubara, Maguk, and Koolpin Gorge, do so at your own risk. Saltwater crocodiles have been known to slip through the traps rangers set alongside popular swimming holes. ***Warning:*** Never swim without checking with a ranger that the water hole is croc-free; if you are unsure, the only place rangers recommend you swim is the hotel pool.

Jabiru, 5km (3 miles) east of the Bowali Visitor Centre, and cost A$120 (US$96) per person for a half-day (A$190/US$152 if there is only one of you) and A$240 (US$192) per person for a full day.

Wide-ranging bush and wetlands trails lead throughout the park, including many short strolls and six half- to full-day treks. Typical trails include a 600m (less than .5-mile) amble through the Manngarre Monsoon Forest near Ubirr Rock; an easy 3.8-kilometer (2-mile) circular walk at the Iligadjar Wetlands near the Bowali Visitor Centre; or a tough 12km (7.5-mile) trek through rugged sandstone country at Nourlangie Rock.

One of the best wetlands walks is at **Mamukala wetlands,** 29km (18 miles) west of Jabiru. Countless thousands of magpie geese feed here, especially in the late Dry season around October. An observation platform gives you a good view of them, and a sign explains the dramatic seasonal changes the wetlands undergo. Choose from a 1km (.5-mile) or 3km (2-mile) meander. The Bowali Visitor Centre sells hiking trail maps. There are also some challenging unmarked trails along creeks and gorges, for which you will need good navigational skills.

## CAMPING

There are 16 national park campgrounds, all mostly near popular billabongs and wetlands, plus three commercial campgrounds attached to accommodations houses. Four of the national park campgrounds—at **Gunlom, Mardugal, Muirella Park** near Nourlangie Rock, and **Merl** in the northeast—have hot showers and toilets; a ranger visits these campgrounds daily to collect a nightly fee of A$5.40 (US$4.30) per person, free for kids under 16. They take only cash.

A campground near Jim Jim Falls and Twin Falls has sites for 200 people. **Garnamarr Campground** (named for the red-tailed black cockatoo commonly found in Kakadu) doesn't accept reservations, so check at the Bowali Visitor Centre (✆ **08/8938 1121**) before driving there, to see whether it is full. The campground manager collects the fee of A$5.40 (US$4.30) per adult per night (cash only) with children under 16 staying free. A gate at the campground controls access to Jim Jim and Twin Falls and is locked between 8:30pm and 6:30am.

The rest are free "bush camps" with no showers and only basic toilets, or none. Inquire at the park entry stations or at the Bowali Visitor Centre for a map marking them. To camp at undesignated campgrounds you will need a permit from the Bowali Visitor Centre. ***Note:*** These can take a week to process, so plan ahead. Bring a mosquito net, as mosquitoes here carry the Ross River virus. RID and Aerogard are two brands of insect repellent that help protect from getting bit.

You need a 4WD to reach some national park campgrounds, and most are closed in the Wet.

### Tips Bushwalking Tips

Try to plan your walk in the early morning or late afternoon, especially in the Wet, as the heat can dehydrate you quickly. If you want to camp at an undesignated campsite on an overnight walk, you will need a permit from the rangers at the Bowali Visitor Centre, which can take a week to arrange.

The best-equipped campsites are at **Gagudju Lodge Cooinda** (see "Where to Stay & Dine," above), which is open year-round. Campers are free to use all of the facilities, although in extremely busy times, the pool may be available only to bungalow guests.

## 3 Katherine

314km (196 miles) S of Darwin; 512km (320 miles) E of Kununurra; 1,177 (736 miles) N of Alice Springs

The key draw to the farming town of Katherine (pop. 11,000) is Katherine (Nitmiluk) Gorge. It's small by the standards of, say, the Grand Canyon, but its dramatic sheer orange walls dropping to a blue-green river make it an unexpected delight in the middle of the dry Arnhemland plateau that stretches to the horizon.

The gorge and its surrounding river ecosystem are located in the 292,008-hectare (721,260-acre) **Nitmiluk National Park** ★★★. In the Dry, the gorge is a haven not just for cruisers but also for canoeists, who must dodge the odd "friendly" freshwater crocodile as they paddle between its walls. In the Wet, the gorge can become a torrent at times, and jet boating is sometimes the only way to tackle it. Hikers will find trails any time of year throughout the park. Farther afield are hot springs, water holes, uncrowded rivers to canoe, and Aboriginal communities where visitors can make dot paintings and find bush tucker.

### ESSENTIALS

**GETTING THERE** **Greyhound Australia** (✆ **13 14 99** in Australia, or 07/4690 9950) buses stop in Katherine on their Darwin–Alice Springs routes. From Darwin, it's about a 4½-hour trip costing A$66 (US$53). From Alice, with departures once a day, it's about a 15-hour journey, for which the fare is A$192 (US$154). Greyhound also runs to Katherine daily from Broome via Kununurra, a journey of about 23 hours costing A$248 (US$198).

Visitors to Katherine can hop aboard the ***Ghan*** (see "Getting Around Australia" in chapter 2) in Adelaide or Alice Springs and hop off in Katherine. The train leaves Adelaide on Sunday at 5:15pm and Alice Springs on Monday at 4pm. The trip from Alice takes about 16 hours. One-way fares are A$240 (US$192) for a "day-nighter" seat or A$880 to A$1,150 (US$704–US$920) for a sleeper. Contact **Great Southern Railways** (✆ **13 21 47** in Australia, or 08/8213 4592; www.gsr.com.au; www.trainways.com.au) for details on connections from Sydney and Melbourne.

At press time, there were currently no airlines operating flights into Katherine.

Katherine is on the Stuart Highway, which links Darwin and Alice Springs. From Alice Springs, allow a good 2 days to make the drive—see "Getting There" in section 2 of chapter 8. The Victoria Highway begins in Katherine and heads west to Kununurra. There is no direct route from the east.

**VISITOR INFORMATION** The **Katherine Visitor Information Centre,** Lindsay Street at Katherine Terrace, Katherine, NT 0850 (✆ **1800/653 142** in Australia, or 08/8972 2650; www.krta.com.au), has information on things to see—not only all around Katherine, but as far afield as Kakadu National Park and the Kimberley. It's open Monday through Friday from 8:30am to 6pm and weekends from 10am to 3pm in the Dry season; in the Wet it's open Monday through Friday from 9am to 5pm.

The **Nitmiluk Visitor Centre,** Gorge Road, Katherine, NT 0850 (✆ **08/8972 1886**), 32km (20 miles) from town, dispenses information on the Nitmiluk National Park and sells tickets for gorge cruises, which depart right outside. The ranger station is here also. The Centre has maps; displays on the park's plant life, birds, geology, and Aboriginal history; a gift shop; and a cafe. It's open daily 7am to 7pm, sometimes closing a little earlier in the Wet. Admission to the park is free.

**GETTING AROUND** **Hertz** (✆ **08/8971 1111**), **Europcar** (✆ **08/8971 2777**), and **Thrifty** (✆ **08/8972 3183**) have outlets in Katherine.

**Travel North** (✆ **1800/089 103** in Australia, or 08/8971 9999) makes transfers from Katherine hotels to the cruise, canoe, and helicopter departure points at the Nitmiluk Visitor Centre three times a day. Round-trip fares are A$21 (US$17) for adults and A$11 (US$8.80) for children. Most Katherine activities and attractions can be booked through Travel North. The company runs many local tours and activities, such as horseback cattle musters, visits to an old homestead, half-day trips to Mataranka Thermal Pools (see below), and tours of up to 5 days taking in Katherine, Darwin, Litchfield and Kakadu national parks, and outlying Aboriginal communities.

For personalized tours both off the beaten path and around town, contact **Far Out Adventures** ★ (✆ **0427 152288**). See p. 404.

## WHERE TO STAY & DINE

The Nitmiluk National Park ranger station in the Nitmiluk Visitor Centre has maps of available "bush campsites" throughout the park. These are very basic sites—no showers, and no soaps or shampoos allowed because they pollute the river system, and simple pit toilets or none at all. Most are beside natural swimming holes. You must stop for a camping permit from the ranger station beforehand; the camping fee is A$3.30 (US$2.65) per person per night.

Travel North runs the **Nitmiluk Gorge Caravan Park** (✆ **1800/089 103** in Australia, or 08/8972 1253; fax 08/8972 3989) next to the Nitmiluk Visitor Centre, where wallabies often hop into the grounds. Fees are A$9 (US$7.20) per adult, A$5.50 (US$4.40) per child for a tent site, and A$22 (US$18) double for a powered site (A$9/US$7.20 for each extra person).

**Knotts Crossing Resort** At this low-key resort, you have a choice of huge, well-furnished motel rooms, some with kitchenettes, minibars, and in-room dataports and fax machines; cabins with a kitchenette inside and a private bathroom just outside the door (but no phone); or campgrounds, all located amid the tropical landscaping. The "village" rooms are a good penny-wise choice, built in 1998 and smartly furnished with a double bed and bunks, a kitchenette, and a joint veranda facing a small private pool with a barbecue. Locals meet at the casual bar beside the pool, and Katie's Bistro is one of the smartest places to eat in town.

Corner of Giles and Cameron sts., Katherine, NT 0850. ✆ **1800/222 511** in Australia, or 08/8972 2511. Fax 08/8972 2628. www.knottscrossing.com.au. 123 units (some with shower only), 75 powered and unpowered campsites. A$75 (US$60) double cabin; A$100 (US$80) double "village" room; A$125–A$150 (US$100–US$120) double motel room;

A$145 (US$116) motel family room for 4. Extra adult A$10 (US$8); extra child under 13 A$5 (US$4). Unpowered site A$10 (US$8) per person per night. Powered site A$22 (US$18) per night double. Extra adult A$10 (US$8); extra child A$5 (US$4). Rates include transfers from airport or bus stop. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; 2 outdoor pools (1 large and attractive, 1 small); Jacuzzi; tour desk; car-rental desk; limited room service; coin-op laundry; laundry service; same-day dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, fax (in some), dataport (in some), kitchenette (in some), minibar (in some), fridge, no phone (in cabins).

## EXPLORING KATHERINE GORGE (NITMILUK NATIONAL PARK)

Cruising the gorge in an open-sided boat is the most popular way to appreciate its beauty. Katherine Gorge is actually a series of 13 gorges, but most cruises only ply the first two, as the second gorge is the most photogenic. **Travel North** (see above) operates all cruises. Most people take the 2-hour cruise, which departs four times a day and costs A$40 (US$32) for adults and A$16 (US$13) for children 5 to 15. There is also a 4-hour cruise at least once daily, although you will probably be satisfied with 2 hours, and an 8-hour cruise/hike safari to the fifth gorge (available from about May–Oct only). Wear sturdy shoes; because each gorge is cut off from the next by rapids, all the cruises involve some walking along the bank to transfer to a boat in the next gorge.

In the Wet season, the cruises may not operate on days when the floodwaters really start to swirl. Instead, Travel North runs a jet boat those days as far as the third gorge. This 45-minute adventure costs A$47 (US$38) for adults and A$34 (US$27) for kids 5 to 15. Departure times vary with the floodwater conditions.

Cruising is nice, but in a canoe you can discover sandy banks and waterfalls, and get up close to the gorge walls, the birds, and those crocs (don't worry, they're the freshwater kind). The gorges are separated by rocks, so be prepared to carry your canoe quite often. Half-day canoe rental from Travel North is A$34 (US$27) for a single canoe and A$51 (US$41) for a double. Full-day rental is A$46 (US$37) for a single canoe and A$69 (US$55) for a double, or A$92 (US$74) single and A$138 (US$110) double if you want to camp out on the river bank overnight (plus a A$3.30/US$2.65 permit fee for overnight camping). There is a A$20 (US$16) refundable deposit on all canoe rentals. Canoeing the gorge is popular, so book canoes ahead, especially in the Dry season. Once the river gets too high for go-it-alone canoeing during the Wet, Travel North runs guided canoeing adventures instead. These last 4 hours and cost A$49 (US$39) per person. In fact, guided paddles are a good idea any time of year as you will learn and see more. The most knowledgeable company is **Gecko Canoeing** ★ (✆ **1800/634 319** in Australia, or 08/8972 2224; www.geckocanoeing.com.au), whose tours are known for their ecotourism content. Gecko's guides have Australia's elite Savannah Guide status. They offer 3- to 7-day canoeing-camping safaris on the Katherine River, as well as a 1-day canoe safari at a cost of A$178 (US$142) per person. The company also runs canoeing and camping safaris (with any other activities you like, such as mountain biking, rock climbing, wildlife photography, hiking, or fishing) of up to 18 days in little-explored wildernesses and river systems across the Top End. Tours run only between April and November, with departures on request, and can be tailored to your needs.

Some 100km (63 miles) of hiking trails crisscross Nitmiluk National Park, ranging in duration from 1 hour to the lookout to 5 days to Edith Falls (see below). Trails—through rocky sandstone-conglomerate terrain and forests, past water holes, and along the gorge—depart the Nitmiluk National Park ranger station, located in the **Nitmiluk Visitor Centre** (✆ **08/8972 1886**), where you can pick up trail maps. Overnight

walks require a deposit of A$20 to A$50 (US$16–US$40) per person, and a A$3.30 (US$2.65) per-person camping permit, payable at the Nitmiluk Visitor Centre.

One of the nicest spots in the park is actually 42km (26 miles) north of Katherine, 20km (13 miles) off the Stuart Highway. **Edith Falls** is a real Eden of natural (croc-free) swimming holes bordered by red cliffs, monsoonal forest, and pandanus trees. A 2.6km (1.5-mile) round-trip bushwalk from the Falls, which takes about 2 hours, incorporates a dip at the upper pool en route. Guided walks are run by Aboriginal traditional owner Ryan Baruwei, who will take you on a 30- or 60-minute walk on the ancient traveling routes of the Jawoyn people. The walks cost A$15 or A$20 (US$12 or US$16); call ✆ **08/8912 2650** for bookings.

More than the gorge itself, the aerial views of the ravine-ridden **Arnhem Plateau,** which stretches uninhabited to the horizon, are arresting. **North Australian Helicopters** (✆ **1800/621 717** in Australia, or 08/8972 1666) offers daily flights of 3, 8, and all 13 gorges for A$60 to A$180 (US$48–US$144) per person. Take at least an eight-gorge flight to get a sense of Australia's vastness. In the Wet, flights from Katherine take travelers to see Jim Jim Falls in Kakadu National Park.

## ABORIGINAL CULTURE TOURS, HOT SPRINGS & MORE

On a 1-day visit to the **Manyallaluk Aboriginal community**, a 90-minute drive southeast from Katherine, you chat with Aborigines about how they balance traditional ways with modern living; take a short bushwalk to look for native medicines and bush tucker like green ants (they're refreshing!); try lighting a fire with two sticks, weaving baskets, throwing spears, painting on bark, and playing a didgeridoo; take a dip in a natural water hole; and buy locally made Aboriginal art and artifacts at better prices than you may find elsewhere. Lunch is a barbecue featuring stuff like high-grade kangaroo filet, kangaroo tail, Scotch filet steak, or barramundi cooked on hot coals. Some visitors rush into these tours and expect the community to be a kind of Aboriginal Disney World theme park with a new attraction every 10 minutes, but that's not how it is. It's an unstructured experience (this is the community's home), so it's up to you to take part. A 1-day tour from Katherine costs A$143 (US$114) for adults and A$79 (US$63) for children 5 to 15, or A$110 (US$88) adults and A$67 (US$54) for kids if you drive yourself. There are basic camping facilities including tent sites and powered and unpowered sites. The last 35km (22 miles) of road is unsealed (unpaved), for which rental cars will be insured only if they are 4WD. The tour runs Monday through Friday from April to September, and Monday, Wednesday, and Friday in October and November, but hours may be reduced, or the place may close, in the Wet. Call ahead before setting off no matter what the time of year, as sometimes the place closes for ceremonies or other cultural reasons. Call Manyallaluk–The Dreaming Place (✆ **08/8975 4727**) or book through Travel North (see above).

In the 500-million-year-old **Cutta Cutta Caves** (✆ **08/8972 1940**), 29km (18 miles) south of Katherine off the Stuart Highway, you will see limestone stalagmites and stalactites and maybe glimpse the resident orange horseshoe and ghost bats. To see the caves, you must take a 1-hour tour, which departs six times a day starting at 9am and costs A$13 (US$10) for adults, A$6.25 (US$5) for children 5 to 15.

One-hundred-ten kilometers (69 miles) south of Katherine on the Stuart Highway is the town of **Mataranka** (pop. 665), where you can soak at the **Mataranka Thermal Pools**. These man-made pools are fed by 93°F (34°C) spring water, which bubbles up from the earth at a rate of 16,495 liters (4,124 gal.) per minute! It's a little paradise, surrounded by palms, pandanus, and a colony of flying foxes. The pools are

open 24 hours, and admission is free. They are 7km (4 miles) along Homestead Road, which is off the highway 1.5km (1 mile) south of Mataranka township. The pools are within the grounds of **Mataranka Homestead Tourist Resort** (✆ **08/8975 4544**), which is less a resort than a low-key collection of motel rooms, cabins, campgrounds, a restaurant or two, and a very casual bar. While you're here, inspect some re-created Aboriginal *gunyahs,* or bark shelters, and a replica of the slab-hut Elsey Homestead. The homestead and pools lie within the 13,840-hectare (34,185-acre) **Elsey National Park.** A sealed road winds from the homestead along the banks of the Roper River, where there are swimming holes and walking trails, including a shaded 4km (2.5-mile) trail into **Mataranka Falls.** ***Note:*** Ask the homestead to direct you to croc-free swimming areas. The homestead sells handlines to fish for barramundi and rents canoes.

Back in town, you can soak your cares away at the pleasantly warm **Katherine Hot Springs,** under shady trees 3km (2 miles) from town on Riverbank Drive. Admission is free. At the **School of the Air,** Giles Street (✆ **08/8972 1833**), you can sit in on an 800,000-sq.-km (262,400-sq.-mile) "classroom" as children from the Outback do their lessons by radio. Forty-five-minute tours begin on the hour from 9am up to and including 2pm (there's no tour at noon). Tours also run during school holidays and public holidays minus the on-air classes. The school is open mid-March until mid-December Monday through Friday 9am to 3pm. Admission is A$5 (US$4) for adults and A$2 (US$1.60) for school-age kids.

Mike Keighley of **Far Out Adventures** ★★ (✆ **0427/152288**) runs upmarket tailor-made tours which include areas around Katherine such as the 5,000-sq.-km (1,930-sq.-mile or 1.2-million-acre) Elsey Cattle Station, 140km (87 miles) southeast of Katherine, made famous as the setting of the Aussie book and film *We of the Never Never.* Meet children of the Mangarrayi Aborigines, sample bush tucker, learn a little bush medicine, and swim in a vine-clad natural "spa-pool" in the Roper River. Mike has been accepted as an honorary family member of the Mangarrayi people and is a mine of information about Aboriginal culture and the bush.

# 10

# Perth & Western Australia

*by Lee Mylne*

Many international visitors—and for that matter, many east coast Australians—never make the trek to Western Australia. It's too far away, expensive to fly to, and too big when you get there, they say. That is all true, especially the bit about it being big (it's 2.5 million sq. km, or 965,000 sq. miles), but don't dismiss a trip out of hand. Domestic flights are getting cheaper, and international travelers can use air coupons (see chapter 2). Some of Australia's best snorkeling and diving, most historic towns, splendid scenery, and fantastic wine regions are here. Every spring (Sept–Nov Down Under) the state offers an unbelievable profusion of wildflowers. The capital, Perth, has great food, a fabulous outdoor life of biking and beaches, plenty of museums that are well worth a look, and a beautiful historic port called Fremantle.

The Southwest "hook" of the state, below Perth, is thought by many to be the loveliest part of Western Australia, and also the easiest region to visit outside Perth. Massive stands of karri and jarrah trees stretch to the sky, the surf is world-class, and the coastline wave-smashed and rugged. The Southwest's Margaret River region is responsible for turning out some of Australia's finest reds and whites.

Head east 644km (400 miles) inland from Perth and you strike what, in the 1890s, was the richest square mile of gold-bearing earth ever. The mining town of Kalgoorlie, Australia's biggest gold producer, fuses 19th-century architecture with a zeal for pumping out near 57 kilograms (2,000 oz.) of gold a day in the 21st century. If Australia has an iconic country town, then Kalgoorlie is it.

Once you drive north of Perth past Geraldton on the Midwest coast, you know you're in the Outback. Red sands, scrubby trees, and spiky grass called spinifex are all you see for hundreds of miles. About 850km (531 miles) north of Perth is a special phenomenon: daily visits by wild dolphins to the shores of Monkey Mia. Another 872km (545 miles) on is one of Australia's best-kept secrets, a 260km (163-mile) coral reef called Ningaloo, stretching along the isolated Outback shore. It's a second Great Barrier Reef, barely discovered by world travelers or Aussies themselves. The reef is making a name for itself as a whale shark habitat, where you can swim with these mysterious 12m (40-ft.) fish-monsters every Aussie fall.

The rugged northwest portion of Western Australia is known as the Kimberley, where cattle farming, pearl farming, and tourism thrive in a rocky moonscape of red cliffs, waterfalls, rivers, sparse gums, and wetland lagoons. Here you can visit an over 400,000-hectare (1-million-acre) cattle station rich in Aboriginal rock-art sites, tour the world's largest diamond mine, cruise the lush Ord River to see hundreds of native birds, ride a camel on the beach, and shop for the world's biggest South Sea pearls.

## EXPLORING THE STATE

**VISITOR INFORMATION** **Tourism Western Australia** is the official source of information on the state. Its website (www.westernaustralia.com) provides a good overview, and you may find the **Australian Tourist Commission's** website (www.australia.com) or the websites of local tourism boards (see "Visitor Information," in each regional section of this chapter) useful. A private company, **Visit WA** (www.visitwa.com.au), offers an online tour-planning service.

Also contact the **Western Australia Visitor Centre** in Perth, which dispenses information about the state and makes bookings. See "Perth," below, for information. The state's **Department of Conservation and Land Management** website (www.calm.wa.gov.au) has information on national and marine parks.

**WHEN TO GO** Perth is blessed with long, dry summers and mild, wet winters. You will want warm gear in the Southwest winters, but temperatures rarely hit the freezing point.

Much north of Perth, summer is hell, when temperatures can soar up to 120°F (50°C). Avoid these parts from December to March; February is worst. Winter (June–Aug) in the mid-, northern, and inland reaches of the state is pleasantly cool, sometimes even hot.

**GETTING AROUND** Before you plan a motoring tour of this state, consider the distance—it's three times as big as Texas—and the mostly arid, flat, and monotonous countryside. The Southwest makes pretty motoring; elsewhere, fly, unless you want to count sheep in all those vast brown paddocks you will be whizzing through if you drive.

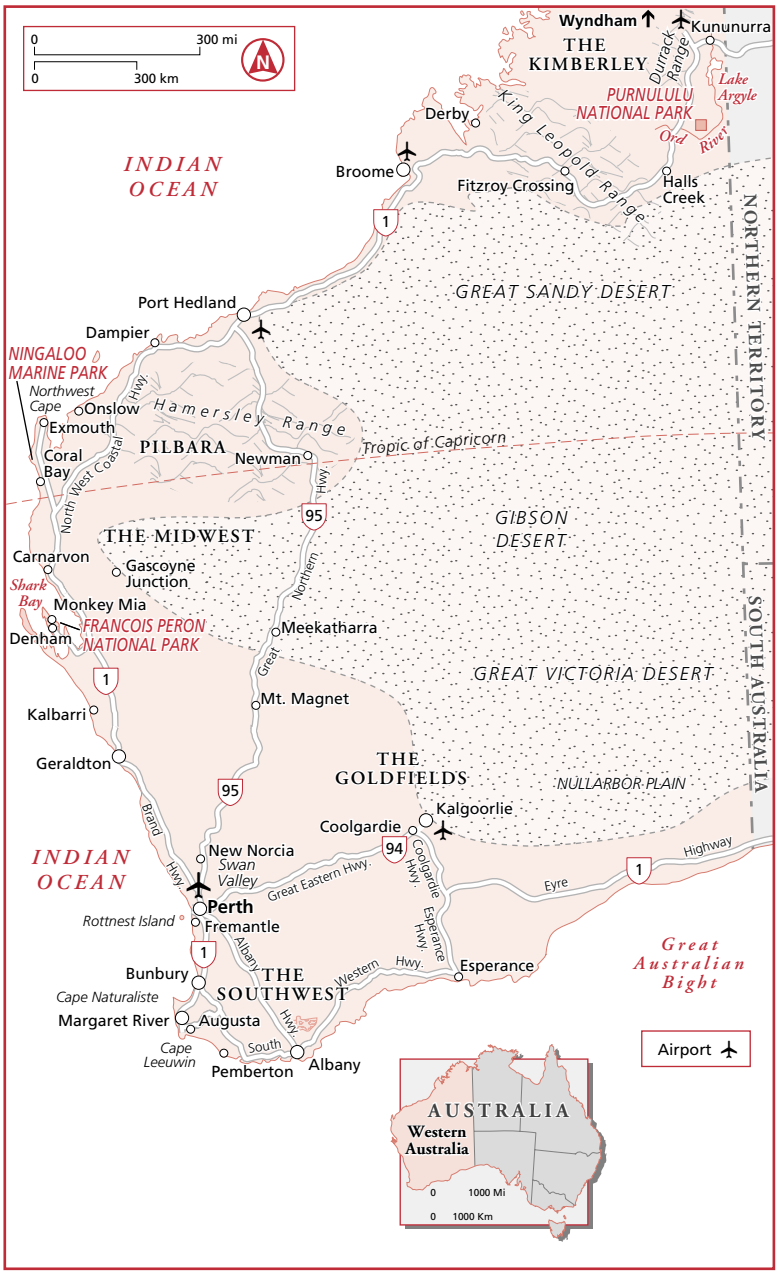
If you do hit the road, remember that Western Australia is largely devoid of people, gas stations (so keep the gas tank full), and emergency help. Road trains and wildlife pose a road threat more so here than in any other state, so avoid driving at night, dusk, and dawn—all prime animal-feeding times. See "Road Conditions & Safety" in the "Getting Around Australia" section of chapter 2 before setting off.

The **Royal Automobile Club of Western Australia (RACWA),** 228 Adelaide Terrace, Perth, WA 6000 (✆ **13 17 03** in Australia, or 08/9421 4444; www.racwa.com.au), is a good source of maps and motoring advice. For a recorded road-condition report, call **Main Roads Western Australia** (✆ **1800/013 314** in Australia).

**Skywest** (✆ **1300/660 088** in Australia; www.skywest.com.au) is the state's major regional airline, with **Qantas** (✆ **13 13 13** in Australia, or 800/227-4500 in the U.S. and Canada; www.qantas.com.au) also providing services to smaller centers.

**Greyhound Australia** (✆ **13 14 99** in Australia, or 07/4690 9950) is the only interstate coach company serving Western Australia. It travels from Adelaide to Perth, up the coast to Broome, and across to Darwin.

The only train to Western Australia from outside the state is the ***Indian Pacific*** ★, from Sydney via Adelaide and Kalgoorlie to Perth (see "Getting Around Australia" in chapter 2). Inside the state, long-distance trains run only in the southern third. They are operated by the **Public Transport Authority (PTA),** also known as TransWA (✆ **1300/662 205** in Western Australia, or 08/9326 2600; www.transwa.wa.gov.au), from Perth to Bunbury, 2¼ hours south of Perth; to Northam, an hour or so east in the Avon Valley; and to Kalgoorlie. TransWA also runs coach services north to Kalbarri, Geraldton, and Meekatharra, to the southwest regions of Augusta and Pemberton, south to Albany, and east to Esperance.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THE KIMBERLEY
Durack Range
Lake Argyle
PURNULULU NATIONAL PARK
Ord River
Derby
King Leopold Range
INDIAN OCEAN
Broome
Fitzroy Crossing
Halls Creek
NORTHERN TERRITORY
GREAT SANDY DESERT
Port Hedland
Dampier
NINGALOO MARINE PARK
Northwest Cape
Onslow
Exmouth
Hamersley Range
North West Coastal Hwy.
PILBARA
Newman
Coral Bay
Tropic of Capricorn
Great Northern Hwy.
95
THE MIDWEST
GIBSON DESERT
Carnarvon
Gascoyne Junction
Shark Bay
Monkey Mia
Denham
FRANCOIS PERON NATIONAL PARK
Meekatharra
Great Northern Hwy.
1
GREAT VICTORIA DESERT
SOUTH AUSTRALIA
Kalbarri
Mt. Magnet
Geraldton
THE GOLDFIELDS
NULLARBOR PLAIN
95
Brand Hwy.
Kalgoorlie
Coolgardie
94
Coolgardie Esperance Hwy.
INDIAN OCEAN
New Norcia
Swan Valley
Great Eastern Hwy.
Eyre Highway
1
Perth
Rottnest Island
Fremantle
Albany Hwy.
Esperance Hwy.
Great Australian Bight
Bunbury
THE SOUTHWEST
Western Hwy.
Esperance
Cape Naturaliste
Margaret River
Augusta
South Western Hwy.
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## Tip-Toeing through the Wildflowers

Every year from August to mid-November, Mother Nature blesses just about the entire state of Western Australia with a carpet of 12,000 species of white, yellow, mauve, pink, red, and blue **wildflowers.**

This annual burgeoning is matched by an explosion of wildflower shows and festivals in country towns throughout the state, and coach and rail tour companies go into overdrive ferrying petal enthusiasts from all around Australia and the globe on wildflower tours. Conveniently, the blossoms cluster in the cooler southern half of the state, where you can easily explore them on day trips from Perth or on longer jaunts of up to 5 days or so. September and October are usually the best months. The most popular route is what the tourism authority calls the **Everlasting Trail** running through sparsely populated country north of Perth. It follows the Great Northern Highway to Wubin, 272km (170 miles) north of Perth, and on to the country town of Mullewa (another 222km/139 miles north), which puts on one of the state's best wildflower shows for a week every August. From here, head west 98km (61 miles) to Geraldton and 424km (265 miles) back to Perth down the Brand Highway for more floral sensations. This route has little of interest except flowers; instead, you can combine wildflower watching with wine tasting on a jaunt to the much prettier, less isolated Southwest (see "Margaret River & the Southwest: Wine Tasting & Underground Wonders," later in the chapter). If time is short, don't despair. You can see ample blossoms right in Perth at Kings Park & Botanic Garden, which conducts free guided walks through its 200 species during its 10-day **Wildflower Festival** every September or October. Because Australian flora is adapted to desert conditions, it tends to sprout on dry, sunny days following a rain shower. For this reason, the Western Australia Visitor Centre (see "Visitor Information," above) runs a Wildflower Desk during the season to keep you up on whatever hot spot is blooming brightest that week and book you on one of the many coach, rail, or 4WD wildflower tours. Interstate buses and trains and hotels fill up in wildflower season, so book ahead. Tourism WA's Wildflower Holiday Guide outlines the best places to view wildflowers, as well as information about self-drive routes and tours. You can download a copy of the guide from www.westernaustralia.com/en/Brochures/Wildflower+Holiday+Guide.htm.

Motorhomes are not necessary as motels are plentiful, but they make good sense if you plan a long-distance tour. Australia's biggest motorhome outfit, **Britz Campervan Rentals,** has an office in Perth (✆ **1800/331 454** in Australia, or 08/9478 3488).

**TOUR OPERATORS** Western Australia's two biggest coach tour companies, **Australian Pinnacle Tours** (✆ **1800/999 069** in Australia, or 08/9417 5555; www.pinnacletours.com.au) and **Feature Tours** (✆ **1800/999 819** in Australia, or 08/9475 2900; www.ft.com.au) serve Perth, the Southwest, Monkey Mia, the Northwest Cape, and attractions about a day's drive away. Australian Pinnacle Tours does four-wheel-drive

tours. **Overland 4WD Safaris** (✆ **08/9524 7122**) runs four-wheel-drive safaris with an off-the-beaten-track bent from Perth throughout the state.

Aerial tours make sense in WA. Look into the personalized or preset tours offered by **Complete Aviation Services** (✆ **1800/632 221** in Australia, or 08/9478 2749; www.casair.com.au) or **Kookaburra Air** (✆ **08/9354 1158;** www.kookaburra.iinet.net.au). Their tours from Perth can take you throughout Western Australia, including the Kimberley, the Top End, and the Red Centre.

**Landscope Expeditions** ★★ is an excellent tour program run by the state's **Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM).** Bookings are handled by the University of Western Australia (✆ **08/9380 2433;** fax 08/9380 1066; www.calm.wa.gov.au/tourism/lsexpeditions). You'll be helping CALM scientists on research projects, such as monitoring endangered loggerhead turtles on Dirk Hartog Island, studying Australia's sea lion colonies in the Abrolhos Islands near the edge of the continental shelf, or recording animal and plant species in Cape Arid National Park on the south coast, among others.

## 1 Perth

4,405km (2,753 miles) W of Sydney; 2,557km (1,598 miles) S of Broome

If you like Sydney, you'll probably like Perth. It has the same skyscrapers glinting in the sun, the same remarkably blue sky, the same outdoorsy vibrancy, and like Sydney, the ocean and glorious white beaches are just a bus ride from downtown. Perth likes to boast it gets more sunshine than any other city in Australia, some 300 days a year.

Perth has lots of fun stuff to do. Wander through the restored historic warehouses, museums, and working docks of Fremantle; stock up at the Aboriginal art and souvenir stores; eat at some of the country's best restaurants (no, they're not all in Sydney and Melbourne); go snorkeling and sea kayaking with wild sea lions; bushwalk through a 405-hectare (1,000-acre) park in the middle of the city; and pedal your bike to a great snorkeling spot on Rottnest Island, a miniature reef resort 19km (12 miles) offshore.

Perth also gives you several good choices of side trips: Wander the streets of historical York, drop in on the Benedictine monks in the Spanish Renaissance town of New Norcia, nip out to the Swan Valley vineyards 20 minutes from town, or spend a few days in Margaret River country, one of Australia's top wine regions.

### PERTH ORIENTATION

**ARRIVING** **By Plane** **Qantas** (✆ **13 13 13** in Australia, or 800/227-4500 in the U.S. and Canada; www.qantas.com.au) flies at least once a day, if not more often, from all mainland state capitals, either direct or with mostly only one stop. **Airlink** (book through Qantas) flies direct from Alice Springs, and from Cairns via Ayers Rock. Airlink also flies from Broome and Darwin, and operates flights from many small towns within Western Australia. **Virgin Blue** (✆ **13 67 89** in Australia, or 07/3295 2296) flies direct from Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, and Adelaide, with connections from other cities.

**Perth International Airport** is 20km (13 miles) northeast of the city, and the domestic terminal is 8km (5 miles) closer. Both offer currency exchange, ATMs, showers, baby changing rooms, lockers, Internet access, direct-dial accommodations boards, mailboxes (the newsstand sells stamps), and a limited range of tourist information. Mobile (cell) telephones can be rented at the international terminal. **Avis**

(✆ 08/9277 1177 domestic terminal, 08/9477 1302 international terminal), **Budget** (✆ 08/9277 9277), **EuropCar** (✆ 08/9237 4320), **Hertz** (✆ 08/9479 4788), and **Thrifty** (✆ 08/9464 7333) have desks at both terminals.

**Feature Tours** runs the **airport–city shuttle** (✆ **1800/999 819** in Australia, or 08/9479 4131), which meets all international and interstate flights. It does not specifically meet intrastate flights. There is no need for reservations. City transfers from the international terminal cost A$11 (US$8.80) adults one-way; domestic terminal-city transfers are A$9 (US$7.20) one-way. Transfers between the domestic and international terminals are A$5.50 (US$4.40) for adults. The **Fremantle Airport Shuttle** (✆ **1300/668 687** in Australia, or 08/9335 1614) operates regular services each day from the airport to hotels, or anywhere else in Fremantle you want to go; you must book in advance. The fare is A$20 (US$16) per person but gets cheaper the bigger your group is—down to A$10 (US$8) per person for five or more people traveling together.

Public bus nos. 37 and 39 run to the city from the domestic terminal. The fare is A$3.10 (US$2.50), and the trip takes about 45 minutes. No buses run from the international terminal. A taxi to the city is about A$28 (US$22) from the international terminal and A$21 (US$17) from the domestic terminal, including a A$1 (US80¢) fee for picking up a taxi at the airport.

**By Train** The 3-day journey to Perth from Sydney via Broken Hill, Adelaide, and Kalgoorlie aboard the ***Indian Pacific*** ★, operated by Great Southern Railway (✆ **13 21 47** in Australia, or 08/8213 4592; www.trainways.com.au), is an experience. The train runs twice a week each direction. The one-way fare ranges from A$1,640 (US$1,312) in first class with meals and private bathroom, to A$1,250 (US$1,000) in comfy second class (meals cost extra, and bathrooms are shared), down to A$513 (US$410) for sit-up-all-the-way coach class (not a good idea). Connections are available from Melbourne on the ***Overland*** train. See "Getting Around Australia," in chapter 2, for contact details in Australia and abroad. The **Prospector** train makes the 7¾-hour trip from Kalgoorlie daily; call the **Public Transport Authority** (**PTA;** ✆ **1300/662 205** in Western Australia, or 08/9326 2600; www.transwa.wa.gov.au). All long-distance trains pull into the East Perth Terminal, Summers Street off Lord Street, East Perth. A taxi to the city center costs about A$10 (US$8).

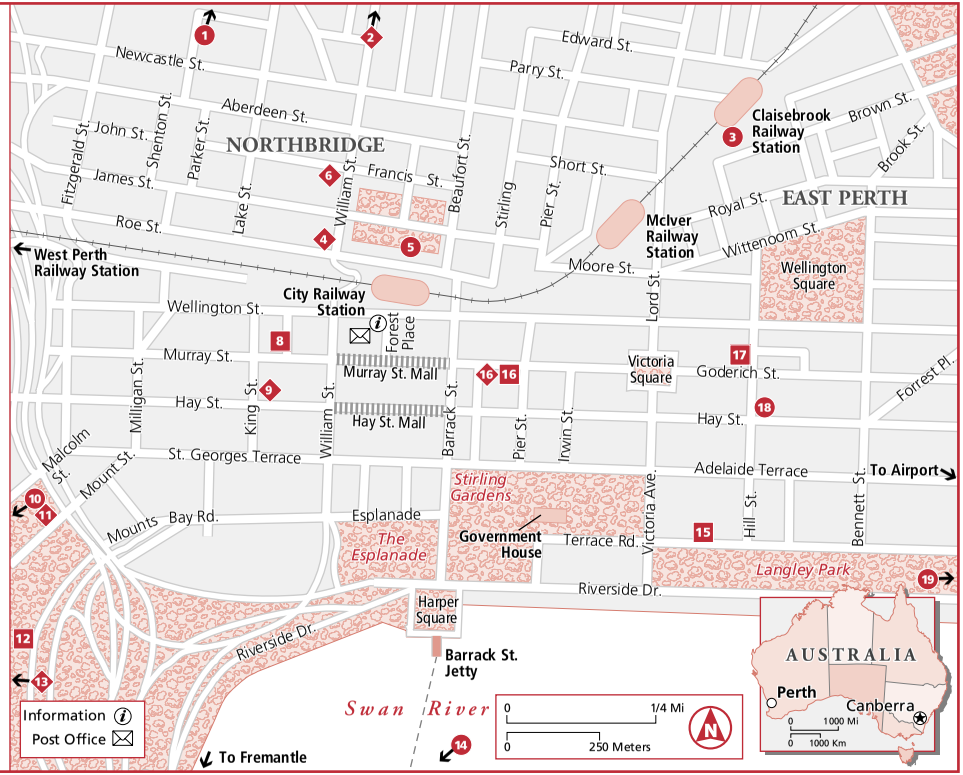
**By Bus** **Greyhound Australia** (✆ **13 14 99** in Australia, or 7/4690 9950) runs daily from Sydney (trip time: 60 hr.) to Adelaide and once a week from Adelaide to Perth (trip time: about 36 hr.). It also has service daily from Darwin via Kununurra and Broome (trip time: about 59 hr.). Traveling from Alice Springs requires a connection in Adelaide and takes about 55 hours. The Sydney-Perth fare is A$428 (US$342), Adelaide-Perth is A$287 (US$230), Darwin-Perth is A$615 (US$492), and Alice Springs–Perth is A$499 (US$399).

**By Car** There are only two interstate road routes. The 2,423km (1,514-mile) route from Broome in the north follows the Great Northern Highway (not so great for road quality), the North West Coastal Highway (a decent enough two-lane affair), and the **Brand Highway** (pretty good). The 2,708km (1,693-mile) route from Adelaide includes hundreds of kilometers along some of the world's straightest road on the treeless Nullarbor Plain. Arm yourself with an up-to-date road map before setting off on this route, and carry spare gas. It's not a bad idea to contact the South Australian or Western Australian state auto clubs (listed under "Getting Around Australia" in chapter 2) for

**ACCOMMODATIONS** ■
City Waters Lodge **15**
Hotel Ibis Perth **8**
Miss Maud Swedish Hotel **16**
River View on Mount Street **11**
Sullivans Hotel **12**
YMCA Jewell House **17**

**DINING** ◆
Govinda's **4**
44 King Street **9**
Fraser's **13**
Miss Maud Swedish Restaurant **16**
Mount Street Café & Food Store **11**
Viet Hoa **2**
Vulture's **6**

**ATTRACTIONS** ●
Aquarium of Western Australia **1**
Art Gallery of Western Australia **5**
Cohunu Koala Park **19**
Holmes à Court Gallery **3**
Kings Park & Botanic Garden **10**
Perth Mint **18**
Perth Zoo **14**
Western Australian Museum **2**



more advice on crossing the Nullarbor. Both routes cross mostly featureless and lonely semidesert, sheep ranches, or wheat fields most of the way, with very few towns en route. For that reason, I don't recommend either!

**VISITOR INFORMATION** The **Western Australian Visitor Centre,** Albert Facey House, 469 Wellington St. (at Forrest Place), Perth (✆ **1300/361 351** in Australia, or 08/9483 1111; www.westernaustralia.com), is the official visitor information source for Perth and the state. It's open Monday through Thursday from 8:30am to 6pm (to 5:30pm in winter, May–July), Friday from 8:30am to 7pm (to 6pm in winter), and Saturday from 8:30am to 12:30pm year-round. The City of Perth's **i-City Information Kiosk,** in the Murray Street Mall near Forrest Place, is open Monday to Thursday and Saturday 9:30am to 4:30pm, Friday 9:30am to 8pm, and Sunday noon to 4:30pm (closed public holidays). Volunteer staff members lead free 90-minute guided tours Monday to Friday at 11am and 2pm, Saturday at 11am, and Sunday at 2pm. There's no need to make reservations. Another source of information and maps (plus a free booking service) is **Perth Tourist Lounge,** Level 2, Carillon Arcade off 207 Murray Street Mall (✆ **08/9481 4400;** www.perthtourist.com.au), open Monday through Saturday 9am to 5:30pm, Sunday noon to 5pm (closed public holidays).

For an untouristy lowdown on the city's restaurants, cultural life, shops, bars, nightlife, concerts, and the like, buy the excellent glossy quarterly magazine ***Scoop*** (A$9.95/US$7.95; www.scoop.com.au), available in bigger newsstands.

**CITY LAYOUT** The city center is 19km (12 miles) upriver from the Indian Ocean, on the north bank of the Swan River. **Hay Street** and **Murray Street** are the two major thoroughfares, 1 block apart; both are bisected by pedestrian malls between William and Barrack streets. It helps to know that Adelaide Terrace and St. Georges Terrace are the same street. The name change occurs at Victoria Avenue.

**MAPS** Of the many free pocket guides to Perth available at tour desks and in hotel lobbies, *Your Guide to Perth & Fremantle* (Countrywide Publications) has the **best street map.** It shows one-way streets, public toilets and telephones, taxi stands, post offices, police stations, and street numbers, as well as most attractions and hotels. The **Royal Automobile Club of Western Australia** (see "Exploring the State," above) is a good source of maps to the state, as is **The Perth Map Centre,** 900 Hay St. (✆ **08/9322 5733**).

## THE NEIGHBORHOODS IN BRIEF

**City Center** The central business district (called the **CBD**) is home to shops and department stores connected by a honeycomb of shopping arcades. A good introduction to Perth's charms is to take in the views from the pedestrian/bike path that skirts the river along Riverside Drive. Within walking distance on the western edge of town is Kings Park & Botanic Garden.

**Northbridge** Just about all of Perth's nightclubs and many of its cool restaurants, bars, and cafes are in this 5-block precinct north of the railway line, within walking distance of the city center. James, Beaufort, Aberdeen, and Lake streets roughly bound it. What locals call the Cultural Centre—an umbrella term that means the Western Australian Museum, the Art Gallery of Western Australia, the State Library, and the Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts—is here too. The free Blue CAT buses deliver you right into the heart of this buzzing precinct.

**Subiaco** This well-heeled suburb is on the other side of Kings Park from the city. Saturday morning wouldn't be Saturday morning for Perth's see-and-be-seen crowd without a stroll through "Subi's" cafes, markets, upscale boutiques, antiques shops, and art galleries. Intersecting Hay Street and Rokeby (pronounced *Rockerby*) Road are the main promenades. Take the train to Subiaco station.

**Fremantle** Not only is this Perth's working port, "Freo" is Perth's second city heart and locals' favorite weekend spot to relax, eat, shop, and sail. A careful 1980s restoration of its Victorian warehouses saw it emerge as a marvelous living example of a 19th-century seaport—kind of like Fisherman's Wharf in San Francisco without the stale commercial taint. Fremantle is 19km (12 miles) downriver on the mouth of the Swan. See "A Day Out in Fremantle," later in this chapter.

**Scarborough Beach** This is one of Perth's prize beaches, 12km (7½ miles) north of the city center. The district is a little tatty with that oversupply of cheap takeout food outlets that plague Aussie beaches, but if you like sun, sand, and surf, this is the place to be. You will find supermarkets, bars, restaurants, shops, and surf-gear rental stores here. Allow 15 to 20 minutes to get there by car, 35 minutes on the bus.

## GETTING AROUND

**BY PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION** **Transperth** (www.transperth.wa.gov.au) runs Perth's buses, trains, and ferries. For route, bus stop, and timetable information, call ✆ **13 62 13** in Western Australia, or 08/9428 1900, or drop into the Transperth Info-Centres at the Plaza Arcade off Hay Street Mall, the Perth Railway Station, the Wellington Street bus station, or the City Bus Port on Mounts Bay Road. You can transfer from bus to ferry to train on one ticket within its expiration time of 2 or 3 hours. Travel costs A$2 (US$1.60) in one zone (to Subiaco, for instance), and A$3 (US$2.40) in two, which gets you most places, including Fremantle. Non–West Australian seniors and students don't qualify for discounted fares; kids ages 5 to 14 do.

**MultiRider** passes give you 10 trips at a savings of 15%; they come in a range of prices good for various numbers of zones. A **DayRider** pass allows 1 day of unlimited travel after 9am on weekdays and all day on weekends and public holidays, and costs A$7.50 (US$6). A **FamilyRider** pass is valid for unlimited all-day travel to any destination and back, for a group of seven people with a maximum of two adults. FamilyRiders are aimed at Perth families and so are valid only on weekends and public

### *Value* A Free Ride

A welcome freebie in Perth is the **Free Transit Zone (FTZ).** You can travel free on trains and buses within this zone any hour, day and night. It is bounded by Kings Park Road, Fraser Avenue, Thomas Street, and Loftus Street in the west; Newcastle Street in the north; and the river in the south and east. Basically, this means you can travel to Kings Park, Northbridge, east to major sporting grounds, and anywhere in the city center for free. Signs mark the boundaries; ask the driver if you're unsure. FTZ boundaries for trains are City West station on the Fremantle line and Claisebrook on the Midland and Armadale lines.

holidays, after 9am weekdays during Western Australian school holidays, after 6pm year-round Monday through Thursday, and after 3pm Friday. They cost A$7.50 (US$6). Passes, collectively known as FastCards, are sold at newsdealers and at Transperth InfoCentres. To use the passes, validate them in the machines on the bus, train platform, or ferry wharf.

Buses and trains run from about 5:30am until about 11:30pm.

**By Bus** The Wellington Street Bus Station (next to Perth Railway Station at Forrest Place) and the City Bus Port on Mounts Bay Road are the two main depots. The vast majority of buses travel along St. Georges Terrace. Drivers do not always stop unless you hail the bus. Buy tickets from the driver. Buses run from about 5:30am until about 10:30 or 11:30pm, depending on the route.

The best way to get around town is on the free **CAT (Central Area Transit)** buses that run a continual loop of the city and Northbridge. The east-west Red CAT runs every 5 minutes, Monday through Friday from 6:50am to 6:20pm, and once every 25 minutes from 10am to 6:15pm weekends. The north-south Blue CAT runs as far north as Northbridge and south to Barrack Street Jetty every 7 minutes from 6:50am. The last Blue CAT service is at 6:20pm Monday through Thursday, and on Friday it continues every 15 minutes from 6:20pm until 1am Saturday. Saturday it runs every 15 minutes from 8:30am to 1am Sunday, and Sunday every 15 minutes from 10am to 5pm. The Yellow CAT runs between East Perth and the city center every 10 minutes from 6 to 9am and every 15 minutes from 9am to 6:20pm weekdays, and every 35 minutes 10am to 6:15pm weekends. There is no CAT service on public holidays. Look for the silver CAT bus stops with the black cat on them. Transperth InfoCentres (see above) dispense free route maps.

Transperth also provides a Night Alight service on all bus routes operating after 7pm each day. You can be dropped off anywhere along the bus route, except places where stopping the bus would create a traffic hazard.

Perth Tram Co. tours (see "Whale-Watching Cruises, Tram Trips & Other Tours," later in this chapter) are a good way to get around, too.

**By Train** Trains are fast, clean, and safe. They start at about 5:30am and run every 15 minutes or more often during the day, and every half-hour at night until midnight. All trains leave from Perth Railway Station opposite Forrest Place on Wellington Street. Buy your ticket before you board, at the vending machines on the platform.

**By Ferry** You will probably use ferries only to visit Perth Zoo. They run every half-hour or so, more often in peak hour, weekdays from 6:50am and weekends from 7:50am, until 7:15pm (9:15pm Fri–Sat from Sept–Apr) from the **Barrack Street Jetty** to **Mends Street** in South Perth. Buy tickets before you board from the machine on the wharf. The trip takes 7 minutes.

**BY TAXI** Perth's two taxi companies are **Swan Taxis** (✆ **13 13 30**) and **Black & White Taxis** (✆ **13 10 08**). Ranks are located at Perth Railway Station and at both ends of Hay Street Mall.

**BY CAR** Perth's signposting is notorious for telling you where you have been, not where you are going—for example, some interstate highways are announced with insignificant signs more suited to a side street.

**Wilson Parking's Central Park,** 152–158 St. Georges Terrace between William and King streets (✆ **08/9226 3577**), charges A$3.80 (US$3.05) per hour and is open Monday through Thursday 6:30am to 8pm, Friday 6:30am to midnight, Saturday

from 8am to 6:30pm, and Sunday from 8:30am to 6:30pm. The maximum charge is A$7 (US$5.60) between 6pm and midnight Friday, or all day Saturday or Sunday.

The major car-rental companies are **Avis** (✆ 08/9325 7677), **Budget** (✆ 08/9480 3111), **EuropCar** (✆ 08/9277 9144), **Hertz** (✆ 08/9321 7777), and **Thrifty** (✆ 08/9464 7444). All except Hertz also have outlets in Fremantle. **ATC Rent-A-Car** (✆ 1800/999 888 in Australia, or 08/9325 1833) is a locally owned outfit with offices in Monkey Mia and Broome; it also rents camping kits. **Hawk Rent-A-Car** (✆ 08/9221 9688) is another local operator worth a try.

## *FAST FACTS:* Perth

***American Express*** The bureau at 645 Hay Street Mall (✆ **08/9221 0777**) is open Monday through Friday 9am to 5pm and Saturday 9am to noon.

***Business Hours*** Banks open Monday through Thursday 9:30am to 4pm and until 5pm Friday. Shopping hours are usually 9am to 5:30pm Monday through Friday (until 9pm on Thurs in the suburbs and Fremantle, and until 9pm Fri in the city), and 9am to 5pm on Saturday. On Sunday most major stores (but not all) open noon to 4pm or later in the city, and from noon to 6pm in Fremantle.

***Currency Exchange*** Go to the American Express office (see above) or **Interforex,** Shop 24, London Court off Hay Street Mall (✆ **08/9325 7418**), open daily 9am to 6pm, and until 9pm Friday. Interforex has a Fremantle bureau at the corner of William and Adelaide streets (✆ **08/9431 7022**) open daily from 8am to 8pm.

***Dentist*** **LifeCare Dental** (✆ **08/9221 2777,** or 08/9383 1620 after hours) is on the Upper Walkway Level, Forrest Chase shopping complex, 425 Wellington St., opposite Perth Railway Station. Open daily from 8am to 8pm.

***Doctor*** **Central City Medical Centre** is on the Perth Railway Station concourse, 420 Wellington St. (✆ **08/9221 4747**), open daily from 8am to 7pm.

***Drugstores*** Forrest Chase Pharmacy (✆ **08/9221 1691**), on the upper level of the Forrest Chase shopping center, 425 Wellington St. (near the dentist's office listed above) is open Monday through Thursday from 8am to 7pm (and until 9pm Fri), Saturday from 8:30am to 6pm, and Sunday from 10am to 6pm. **Shenton Pharmacy,** 214 Nicholson Rd., Subiaco (✆ **08/9381 1358** business and after hours), will deliver across Perth.

***Embassies & Consulates*** The **United States Consulate-General** is at 16 St. Georges Terrace (✆ **08/9202 1224**). The **Canadian Consulate** is at 267 St. Georges Terrace (✆ **08/9322 7930**). The **British Consulate-General** is at 77 St. Georges Terrace (✆ **08/9224 4700**). The **Irish Consulate-General** is at 10 Lilika Rd., City Beach (✆ **08/9385 8247**).

***Emergencies*** Dial ✆ **000** for fire, ambulance, or police in an emergency. This is a free call, and no coins are needed from a public phone.

***Hospitals*** Royal Perth Hospital (✆ **08/9224 2244**) in the city center has a public casualty ward (emergency room). Enter from Victoria Square, accessed from Murray Street.

***Lost Property*** For lost property, call ✆ **08/9326 2544** (trains), ✆ **08/9221 2722** (ferries) or ✆ **08/9225 5565** (CAT buses). Check with the local police station closest to where the item was lost (central police operations, ✆ **13 14 44**, can give you the nearest station's telephone number).

***Luggage Storage & Lockers*** The **Perth Tourist Lounge** (see "Visitor Information," earlier in the chapter) stores luggage, and there are baggage lockers at the international and domestic terminals at the airport.

***Police*** Dial ✆ **000** in an emergency. **Perth Police Station,** 60 Beaufort St. (✆ **08/9223 3715**), and **Fremantle Police Station,** 45 Henderson St. (✆ **08/9430 1222**), are open 24 hours. To be connected to the nearest station, dial ✆ **13 14 44.**

***Post Office*** The General Post Office on Forrest Place (✆ **13 13 18**) is open Monday through Friday 8am to 5:30pm, Saturday 9am to 12:30pm, closed Sunday. There are post offices at 26 and 66 St. Georges Terrace, at Cloisters Square at 863 Hay St., and in just about every suburb. Most post offices open Monday through Friday 9am to 5pm; some are also open Saturday mornings.

***Safety*** Perth is safe, but steer clear of the back streets of Northbridge at night, as groups of teenage boys have been known to pick fights.

***Time Zone*** Western Australian time (WST) is GMT plus 8 hours and has no daylight saving. This means it is normally 2 hours behind Sydney and Melbourne, 3 hours from October to March when New South Wales and Victoria go to daylight saving. Call ✆ **1194** for the exact local time.

***Weather*** Call ✆ **1196** for a recorded local weather forecast.

## WHERE TO STAY

Perth has a surfeit of upscale hotels in the city center, so it's possible to get a good deal in an expensive lodging when the business travelers go home. Definitely ask about weekend deals. If you're not afraid to negotiate, you can strike a good deal on weeknights, too, if business is slow across town.

### IN THE CITY CENTER

**City Waters Lodge** *Value* Try to get one of the apartments on the end of this old, neatly maintained three-story block by the river, as they have parkland views. The fixtures in these apartments are a bit dated, especially in the kitchen and bathroom, but you get plenty of space, daily servicing, and the same brand of mattresses used by the city's five-star hotels. The three two-bedroom units have two TVs and two phones. The hosts will carry your luggage and order in continental breakfast from a nearby deli. City buses run along St. Georges Terrace a block away, and you're a 5-block walk from Hay Street Mall.

118 Terrace Rd. (between Victoria Ave. and Hill St.), Perth, WA 6000. ✆ **1800/999 030** in Australia, or 08/9325 1566. Fax 08/9221 2794. www.citywaters.com.au. 61 units. A$85 (US$68) double 1-bedroom apt; A$130 (US$104) 2-bedroom apt (sleeps 5). Weekly rates available. MC, V. Free parking. Bus: Blue CAT to Stop 19 (Barrack Square). Airport shuttle. **Amenities:** Tour desk; car-rental desk; coin-op self-service laundry. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, coffeemaker.

**Hotel Ibis Perth** ★ *Value* Ibis is one of those reputable chain brands of the "four-star facilities at a three-star price" variety. Shops, cinemas, and Hay Street Mall are a block or two away from this hotel. The neat, no-frills rooms here were thoroughly renovated

with funky colors and high-quality beds in 2001, and the lobby, restaurant, and bar were refurbished in 2003. The rooms are small, but a nice room in this location for this price is hard to beat.

334 Murray St. (between William and King sts.), Perth, WA 6000. ✆ **08/9322 2844** for Hotel Ibis; 1300/88 4400 in Australia, 800/221-4542 in the U.S. and Canada, 020/8283 4500 in the U.K., or 0800/44 4422 in New Zealand for Accor. Fax 08/9321 6314. www.accorhotels.com.au. 192 units (all with shower only). A$119 (US$95) double. Extra person A$30 (US$24). Children under 12 stay free in parent's room with existing bedding. AE, DC, MC, V. Discounted self-parking at the nearby Queen St. parking lot. Bus: Red CAT to Stop 29 (King St.); Blue CAT to Stop 17 (Murray St. Mall W.). **Amenities:** Restaurant; 2 bars; tour desk; car-rental desk; airport shuttle; business center; babysitting; coin-op self-service laundry; same-day dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

**Miss Maud Swedish Hotel** ★ Many of the rooms in this homey hotel in the heart of town have been gutted and totally rebuilt within the past 2 years. New furnishings include the Scandinavian colors of yellow and blue, while others have a crisp Nordic look of cream and pale blue. A private sun deck is tucked away among the rooftops. The real Miss Maud, Maud Edmiston, wants guests to feel they are in a European family hotel like those in her Swedish homeland, and she succeeds—in part due to the staff, which is more polite and on the ball than that in most AAA-rated five-star hotels. The breakfast included in the room rate is a fabulous buffet at Miss Maud Swedish Restaurant downstairs (p. 444).

97 Murray St. (at Pier St.), Perth, WA 6000. ✆ **1800/998 022** in Australia, or 08/9325 3900. Fax 08/9221 3225. www.missmaud.com.au. 52 units (40 with shower only). A$88–A$150 (US$70–US$120) double. Extra adult A$30 (US$24), extra child ages 4–13 A$15 (US$12). Rates include smorgasbord breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking A$12 (US$9.60) 1 block away. Bus: Red CAT to Stop 1 (Pier St.); Blue CAT to Stop 5 (Murray St. Mall E.). **Amenities:** Restaurant/bar (see "Great Deals on Dining," below); takeout pastry shop; access to nearby health club; tour desk; car-rental desk; airport shuttle; limited room service (7am–9pm); babysitting; coin-op laundry; laundry service; dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV/VCR w/pay movies, dataport, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer.

**River View on Mount Street** ★ *Value* On a quiet, leafy street a short walk from the city and Kings Park, these roomy studio apartments in a 1960s block were refurbished in 1999 with new kitchenettes and bathrooms, fresh carpets and curtains, and smart-looking fittings. The result is great style at a great price. Some have distant views of the river, a few blocks away, and some sleep three. Maid service is weekly. The on-site managers loan hair dryers and irons. You can have breakfast at the Mount Street Café downstairs (p. 444), which also sells prepared curries and deli items. No smoking.

42 Mount St., Perth, WA 6000. ✆ **08/9321 8963.** Fax 08/9322 5956. www.riverview.au.com (not "www.river view.com.au"). 50 units (all with shower only). A$85–A$95 (US$68–US$76) apt. Weekly rates available. AE, MC, V. Limited free parking. Bus: Red CAT to Stop 19 (QVI), then walk over the freeway footbridge from corner of St. Georges Terrace and Milligan St. **Amenities:** Cafe (see "Great Deals on Dining," below); access to nearby golf course and health club; tour desk; car-rental desk; airport shuttle; coin-op laundry; laundry service; same-day dry cleaning; non-smoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, kitchenette, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

**Sullivans Hotel** This family-owned hotel about 1.5km (1 mile) from town is popular with Europeans for its small-scale ambience. Despite being on the main road into the city, none of the rooms seem noisy. They're simply furnished with laminate fittings, not glamorous but roomy. Larger deluxe rooms come with desks, safes, and balconies with views over parkland and the freeway to the river. There are also two-bedroom apartments with kitchenettes. Out back is a pleasant little pool with a sun deck and barbecue. Bikes are free, the restaurant is affordable, and the front desk has free 24-hour Internet access for guests. Some rooms have dataports. The Swan River is a stroll away, the city is a 10-minute walk, and Kings Park is a short, steep climb up the hill.

166 Mounts Bay Rd., Perth, WA 6000. ✆ **1800/999 294** in Australia, or 08/9321 8022. Fax 08/9481 6762. www.sullivans.com.au. 68 units (66 with shower only). A$120–A$140 (US$96–US$112) up to 4 people in room; A$150 (US$120) 1-bedroom apt; A$190 (US$152) 2-bedroom apt. Ask about packages. Weekly rates available. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. Bus: 71, 72, or 78 (hotel is within Free Transit Zone). **Amenities:** Restaurant/bar; small outdoor pool; free bikes; tour desk; airport shuttle; limited room service; babysitting; coin-op laundry; laundry service; same-day dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV w/free movies, dataport (in some), kitchenette (in 2-bedroom apt.), coffeemaker, hair dryer, safe (in some).

### SUPER-CHEAP SLEEPS

**YMCA Jewell House** You'll love the prices and the river panorama from the south rooms in this 11-story one-time nurses' quarters. Bathrooms are communal but clean. Rooms contain beds, a fan, self-serve tea and coffee, and linen and towels. Maid service is daily. There is 24-hour reception, currency exchange, TV, phone and Internet lounges, a wonderfully affordable cafe, and helpful staff. The Perth Mint is a block away, and Hay Street Mall is a 5-block stroll.

180 Goderich St., Perth, WA 6000. ✆ **1800/998 212** in Australia, or 08/9325 8488. Fax 08/9221 4694. www.ymcajewellhouse.com. 200 units, none with bathroom. A$46 (US$37) double; A$75 (US$60) family room (sleeps 5). AE, DC, MC, V. Free off-street parking for 16 cars. Bus: Red CAT to Stop 4 (Bennett St.). Airport shuttle. **Amenities:** Cafe; tour desk; self-service laundry. *In room:* A/C, coffeemaker, no phone.

### IN FREMANTLE

There's a perpetual holiday atmosphere in this picturesque port city. Although you are 19km (12 miles) from Perth's city center, public transport connections are good, so you can happily explore all of Perth from here—and most of the top attractions are in Freo anyhow. There are good restaurants and a happening nightlife, too.

**Fremantle Colonial Accommodation** A stroll in any direction from this historic terrace guesthouse on Freo's main street brings you to a museum, a harbor, shops, and other attractions. All the rooms are decorated in colonial style—one has a blue-and-yellow liberty-print quilt and an ornate plaster ceiling rose, another has lace curtains and a fireplace. The clean bathrooms are tiled in dark green or maroon and white. Rooms vary in size but all have a table with cereals, tea and coffee, a kettle, toaster, minifridge, and bathrobes. A light breakfast is included, or for A$5 (US$4) you can have a more substantial continental breakfast including a large fruit platter. The in-room dining tables are quite small, as are the TVs, so this place is more for folks who just want somewhere to lay their heads at night, rather than a comfortable establishment in which to hang around for half the day. There is also a guest lounge. Two of the rooms can be used as a self-contained apartment with a kitchenette.

One block behind the guesthouse, your hosts Val and Ian have four limestone cottages perched on a hill overlooking the town. They were built in the 19th century as prison guards' quarters. Each has two pretty bedrooms with patchwork quilts, complimentary toiletries, fireplaces, antique furniture, and rag dolls or teddy bears in the corner. Each also has a large eat-in kitchen with a modern stove alongside the original wood-fired one, a sunroom, laundry facilities, a wooden porch out front, and a lovely stone courtyard out back with outdoor dining furniture. All have ceiling fans, one is air-conditioned, and one is fitted for travelers with disabilities.

215 High St., Fremantle, WA 6160. ✆ **08/9430 6568.** Fax 08/9430 6405. www.babs.com.au/colonial. 6 units in guesthouse, 2 with bathroom (shower only). 3 cottages, all with bathroom (1 with shower only). Guesthouse A$121 (US$97) single; A$127–A$138 (US$102–US$110) double. Extra person A$17 (US$14). Cottages A$165 (US$132) double. Extra adult A$22 (US$18), extra child A$11 (US$8.80) (maximum 5 people). MC, V. Free parking. Train: Fremantle. **Amenities:** Fremantle airport shuttle; 1 room for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C (in some), TV, kitchen (in cottages), kitchenette (in some), fridge, coffeemaker, laundry (in cottages).

## GREAT DEALS ON DINING

Perth's restaurant scene bubbles over with terrific ethnic places that are kind to your wallet and a treat for your taste buds. If you can't find the kind of cuisine you want in Northbridge, it probably doesn't exist, for this restaurant mecca has Thai, Greek, Vietnamese, Malaysian, Italian, Chinese, and about every other kind of food you can think of. Don't forget that going BYO (Bring Your Own wine or beer) lessens the pain in your wallet. Some restaurants charge corkage fees, usually A$1 or A$2 (US80¢ or US$1.60) per person, but sometimes as much as A$4 (US$3.20) per person.

For inexpensive pasta, a Turkish bread sandwich, or excellent coffee and cake, you can't beat Perth's homegrown **DOME** chain of cafes. You will spot their dark green logo at Trinity Arcade between Hay Street Mall and St. Georges Terrace (✆ 08/9226 0210); 149 James St., Northbridge (✆ 08/9328 8094); 13 S. Terrace, Fremantle (✆ 08/9336 3040); 19 Napoleon St., Cottesloe (✆ 08/9383 1071); 26 Rokeby Rd., Subiaco (✆ 08/9381 5664); and on Rottnest Island (✆ 08/9292 5026).

Western Australian law bans smoking in enclosed public spaces like restaurants.

### IN THE CITY CENTER

**Basil Leaves Café** *Finds* ASIAN An extensive menu of predominantly Thai dishes is served up without fuss at this simple but popular restaurant in the rapidly developing East Brook Village in East Perth. There's the usual array of chicken, beef, lamb, and pork dishes, with several more expensive seafood dishes, and some tasty curries. The service is friendly and efficient.

Shop 37, 82 Royal St., East Perth (at Plain St.) ✆ **08/9221 8999.** Main courses A$12–A$20 (US$9.60–US$16). MC, V. Mon–Fri 11:30am–late; Sat–Sun 5pm–late. Bus: Yellow CAT.

**44 King Street** ★★ MODERN AUSTRALIAN Socialites and hip corporate types adorn this sophisticated hangout. The interior is a mix of industrial design and European cafe, with dark timber tables, exposed air ducts, and windows onto the street. The open kitchen produces a daily changing menu of weird and wonderful choices with exotic ingredients—such as fennel roasted duck with paella of Valencia, the Javanese Mie-Goreng and peanut-crusted prawns, or Cajun pink snapper with sweet potato *frites* and avocado sour cream. Not only does the menu helpfully list wine suggestions for each dish, but it also offers taster-size glasses from around A$3 (US$2.40) to A$8.50 (US$6.80) from a 200-strong wine list. Lots of folks drop in just for coffee, roasted on-site, and the famous cakes. All meals are available to take out.

44 King St. ✆ **08/9321 4476.** Reservations not accepted. Tasting menu A$3.50–A$13 (US$2.80–US$10) breakfast, A$18–A$33 (US$14–US$26) lunch and dinner. AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 7am–midnight. Bus: Red CAT to Stop 29 (King St.); Blue CAT to Stop 1 (Cloisters).

**Fraser's** ★★★ *Moments* MODERN AUSTRALIAN/SEAFOOD What a sensational view! The city skyscrapers and Swan River look so close you could almost reach out and touch them—and even better, the victuals match the vista. Executive chef Chris Taylor's sure hand with seafood, which composes about 70% of the long menu, has made this hilltop restaurant a finalist for national restaurant of the year awards more than once. Fresh tiger prawns with Vietnamese mint and *tatsoi,* with a black vinegar dressing, is typical. To maximize the view, ask for a seat on the terrace.

Fraser Ave. (near the Information Kiosk), Kings Park. ✆ **08/9481 7100.** Reservations required. Main courses A$30–A$39 (US$24–US$31). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 7:30am–late. Closed Good Friday. Ample free parking. Bus: 33 stops outside the Information Kiosk. Red CAT Stop 26 (Havelock St.) is 1 block north of the gates.

### Value Super-Cheap Eats in Northbridge

Bless the Hare Krishnas for their wonderful cheap restaurants dispensing delicious vegetarian nourishment. **Govinda's** at 200 William St., Northbridge (✆ **08/9227 1684**) serves an all-you-can-eat buffet for A$6 (US$4.80) (A$5/US$4 for seniors and students) Monday through Friday from noon to 2:30pm and on Saturdays from noon to 1pm. They serve takeaways from 5 to 6pm weekdays, and there is a Sunday feast from 5pm for only A$4 (US$3.20).

**Miss Maud Swedish Restaurant** Value INTERNATIONAL "Good food and plenty of it" is the motto at Miss Maud's establishment, and the crowds packing the place prove it works. Most diners skip the a la carte menu and go straight for the smorgasbord. At breakfast, that means 50 dishes, including pancakes cooked before your eyes. At lunch and dinner you can tuck into soup, 10 salads, a range of seafood (including oysters at dinner), cold meats, roasts, hot vegetables, pasta, cheeses, European-style breads, half a dozen tortes, fruit, and ice cream—65 dishes in all. Service is fast and polite.

Below the Miss Maud Swedish Hotel, 97 Murray St. (at Pier St.). ✆ **08/9325 3900.** Reservations recommended. Smorgasbord breakfast A$19 (US$15) Mon–Fri, A$20 (US$16) weekends and holidays; lunch A$28 (US$22) Mon–Sat, A$30 (US$24) Sun and holidays; dinner A$35 (US$28) Sun–Thurs, A$37 (US$30) Fri, and A$39 (US$31) Sat and holidays. A la carte main courses, sandwiches, and light meals A$6–A$20 (US$4.80–US$16). Smorgasbord discounts for children 4–13. AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 6:45–10am (11am on weekends and holidays), noon–2:30pm (3pm on weekends and holidays), 5:30–10pm (9.30pm on Saturdays and holidays). Coffee and cake served all day. Bus: Red CAT to Stop 1 (Pier St.); Blue CAT to Stop 5 (Murray St. Mall E.).

**Mount Street Café and Food Store** ★★ MODERN AUSTRALIAN Chef Toby Uhlrich turns out yummy dine-in and takeout fare at this charming alfresco cafe on the edge of the central business district. Come for lunches like risotto with asparagus, chicken, roasted almonds, and Parmesan, or your choice of light snacks from the deli cabinet. Breakfasts are equally fresh and delicious. Dine inside at one of a few tables or out on the shaded stone terrace. Drop by anytime for cakes and good coffee, but be prepared to fight the regulars for a table. BYO (corkage fee A$2.50/US$2).

Under River View on Mount Street apts, 42 Mount St. ✆ **08/9485 1411.** Reservations recommended on weekends. Breakfast A$5.80–A$17 (US$4.65–US$14); main courses A$14–A$21 (US$11–US$17). AE, MC, V. Daily 7:30am–5pm. Bus: Red CAT to Stop 19 (QVI), then walk over freeway footbridge from corner of St. Georges Terrace and Milligan St.

## IN NORTHBRIDGE

**Viet Hoa** CHINESE/VIETNAMESE With its tablecloths, fake plants, and airy dimensions, the Viet Hoa is a little more upscale than some similar cheap eateries around, and the servings are huge, so don't over-order. The cold Vietnamese spring rolls remind you what fresh food is supposed to taste like. The fare is standard stir-fries, satays, and sweet-and-sour dishes. Licensed and BYO.

349 William St. ✆ **08/9328 2127.** Reservations recommended on Fri and Sat night. Most main courses A$5–A$14 (US$4–US$11). AE, MC, V. Daily 10am–10pm. Train: Perth. Bus: Blue and Weekend CAT to Stop 10 (Aberdeen St.).

**Vulture's Restaurant & Café** ★ ECLECTIC/MODERN AUSTRALIAN This roomy, relaxed, and groovy restaurant has a knack for suiting all occasions and all folk, from couples sharing a romantic dinner in the street-side courtyard to teenage nightclubbers hanging out. The place is scattered with funky bric-a-brac, from Indian eagle

totems to Balinese four-poster wedding beds—you can even sit inside them on cushions and eat at a low coffee table, instead of at the regular tables. The main courses are sophisticated and skillfully cooked—rack of spring lamb with rosemary and apricot crust, served with a layered sweet-potato cake and sugar snap peas, or seared Atlantic salmon filet with wasabi mash and palm sugar dressing, for example. There is also plenty of light stuff, such as Thai green chile mussels, nachos, or pastas.

Francis St. (at William St.), Northbridge. ✆ **08/9227 9087.** Reservations recommended for dinner Fri–Sat. Main courses A$18–A$30 (US$14–US$24); dine-in or takeout sandwiches at lunch A$7–A$9 (US$5.60–US$7.20). Kids' menu A$7 (US$5.60). AE, DC, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 11am–1am; Fri–Sat 11am–2am or later. Bus: Blue CAT to Stop 9 (TAFE).

## ON THE BEACH

**The Blue Duck** ★★ *Kids* INTERNATIONAL/PIZZA For ocean views and a lively atmosphere, it's hard to beat this casual restaurant perched right over the sand. Although the interior lacks the balcony's panoramic position, it has an upbeat seaside ambience and is as packed as the porch. The lunch and dinner menu has lots of light choices like crispy duck salad and Mediterranean and Asian tasting plates, as well as steaks, grilled fish, gourmet burgers, and wood-fired pizzas with creative toppings.

151 Marine Parade, North Cottesloe. ✆ **08/9385 2499.** Reservations recommended. Breakfast A$4–A$14 (US$3.20–US$11); main courses A$11–A$27 (US$8.80–US$22), with many meals under A$20 (US$16). Buffet breakfast Sat–Sun and holidays A$15–A$25 (US$12–US$20). Kids' menu A$7–A$9 (US$5.60–US$7.20). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 6am–late (from 6:30am in winter); weekends and public holidays 7am–late. Bus: 71, 72, 73, or 883.

**Indiana Tea House** ★ MODERN AUSTRALIAN The colonial Asian trappings (bamboo bird cages, plaster lions, and palms) and cane chairs at this bathhouse-turned-restaurant on Cottesloe Beach will make you want to head straight for the tropical timber bar and order a cocktail. Try a Cottesloe Sunset. Actually, the tasteful stucco building with bay windows and wooden floors is new—it just looks old. The menu slants heavily toward seafood, including a mild Thai green seafood curry with a medley of seafood including prawns, calamari, fish and scallops, or a fresh whole fish, filled with a julienne of vegetables and coriander, ovenbaked and served with lime butter. Other options include rib-eye filet steak, lamb, and chicken dishes. This place is just as popular with business folk cutting deals as it is with arty types browsing the papers over their *caffe lattes.* Go in the daytime to make the most of those ocean views, or at sunset.

99 Marine Parade (on Cottesloe Beach opposite Forrest St.), Cottesloe. ✆ **08/9385 5005.** Reservations recommended. Main courses A$26–A$48 (US$21–US$38). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily noon–4pm and 6pm–late. Bus: 71, 72, 73, or 883.

## IN FREMANTLE

**Kailis' Fish Market Café** SEAFOOD Freo has loads of restaurants, but for the best fish and chips in town, this is the place. A feature of the Freo waterfront since 1928, the place is now in the hands of a third generation of the Kailis family. The size of the restaurant is a bit daunting, and it's packed with tourists, but you can sit inside or outside. The range of fresh seafood to choose from is enormous. Whether you go for chowder, chile mussels, oysters, lobster, or simply grilled fish and salad, you'll find out why Kailis' has been voted best fish and chips in WA. Licensed for wine and beer only.

46 Mews Road. ✆ **08/9335 7755.** Main courses A$8.20–A$19 (US$6.55–US$15). Children's menu A$5.50 (US$4.40). MC, V. Daily 8am–8:30pm. Train: Fremantle.

## WHAT TO SEE & DO IN PERTH

### AQWA (Aquarium of Western Australia) *Kids*

You won't catch performing dolphins a la Sea World, but there's plenty to see here, including a moving walkway through an underwater tunnel with a view of sharks, rays, turtles, and fish; a touch pool that has a small shark; and lots of aquariums that showcase the marine life of the Western Australian coast, including pretty leafy sea dragons, coral reefs, jellyfish, cuttlefish, sea snakes, crocodiles, and deadly stonefish that look remarkably like stones. Keepers feed the sharks and the touch-pool creatures daily, and a program of talks and movies on marine creatures runs throughout the day. For A$99 (US$79) plus A$15 (US$12) for snorkel gear or A$30 (US$24) for dive gear, you can swim with the sharks. You may need to book this experience weeks in advance. Allow half a day here.

Sorrento Quay at Hillarys Boat Harbour, 91 Southside Dr., Hillarys. ✆ **08/9447 7500.** www.aqwa.com.au. Admission A$23 (US$18) adults, A$18 (US$14) seniors and students, A$13 (US$10) children 4–15, free for children under 4, A$65 (US$52) families of 4. Daily 10am–5pm; sometimes later in Jan. Closed Dec 25. Train: Joondalup line to Warwick, transfer to bus no. 423. By car, take Mitchell Fwy. 23km (14 miles) north, turn left onto Hepburn Ave. and proceed to roundabout at entrance to Hillarys Boat Harbour; AQWA is at the western end of the harbor.

### Art Gallery of Western Australia

Most outstanding among this state gallery's international and Australian works is the Aboriginal art collection, regarded as the finest in Australia. Free 1-hour tours of a particular collection run Tuesday through Friday and Sunday at 1pm; Friday tours are at 12:30pm.

Roe St. and Beaufort St. (enter near the walkway opposite Perth Railway Station), Northbridge. ✆ **08/9492 6600** administration, or 08/9492 6622 recorded info line. Free admission. Admission fee may apply to special exhibitions. Daily 10am–5pm. Closed Good Friday, Dec 25, and until 1pm Apr 25 (Anzac Day). Train: Perth. Bus: Blue CAT to Stop 7 (Museum).

### Cohunu Koala Park

Not all states in Australia permit **koala cuddling,** but Western Australia does, and this large park set in bushland is the only place in Western Australia where you can do it. You can also feed 100 kangaroos, wallabies, and emus wandering in natural enclosures; see wombats and dingoes; walk through an aviary housing Aussie native birds; and see wild waterbirds on the ponds. The Caversham Wildlife Park in the Swan Valley (see "Side Trips from Perth," later in the chapter) has a bigger and more intriguing range of native species, but it does not allow koala cuddling.

Off Mills Rd. E., Gosnells (in the suburb of Martin on some maps). ✆ **08/9390 6090.** Admission A$20 (US$16) adults, A$10 (US$8) children 5–14. Koala-cuddling photos A$38 (US$30), or A$20 (US$16) if you take the photo yourself. Daily 10am–5pm; koala photo sessions 10am–4pm. Closed Dec 25. Train: Armadale line to Gosnells, then cab (about A$15/US$12). Bus: 219. By car, take Riverside Dr. across Swan River onto Albany Hwy., follow for approximately 25km (16 miles) to Gosnells, turn left onto Tonkin Hwy. and right onto Mills Rd. E. (approximately 35-min. drive from city). A cab from the city is approximately A$40 (US$32).

### Holmes à Court Gallery

This small riverside gallery offers rotating exhibitions from one of the country's most outstanding private art collections, that of Janet Holmes à Court, Australia's richest woman. Many of the works are Aboriginal or by well-known Australian artists such as Sidney Nolan.

11 Brown St., East Perth. ✆ **08/9218 4540.** Free admission. Thurs–Sun noon–5pm. Closed public holidays. Train: Claisebrook.

### Kings Park & Botanic Garden

Smack against the city center and Swan River is this 400-hectare (988-acre) hilltop park of botanic gardens and bushland. You can inspect weird and wonderful Western Australian flora; experience the solitude of the bush; and bike, hike, or drive an extensive network of roads and trails. Visiting the

spring **wildflower displays** (which peak Sept–Oct) is a highlight. During the wildflower festival and on some other occasions such as Christmas and Anzac Day (Apr 25), the lemon-scented gums lining Fraser Avenue are illuminated. There are barbecue and picnic facilities, several extensive playgrounds, bikes for rent (behind the Visitor Information Centre), tearooms, and the incomparable **Fraser's** restaurant (p. 443).

Pick up self-guiding maps from the Visitor Information Centre or join one of the free guided walks leaving from opposite the flower clock on Fraser Avenue. Walks depart daily at 10am and 2pm and take 1½ hours, or 2 or 3 hours for bushwalks (May–Oct only). The **Perth Tram Co.** (✆ **08/9322 2006**) runs 1-hour tours of the park and neighboring University of Western Australia in replica 1899 wooden trams. Tours depart from outside the Information Kiosk on Fraser Avenue daily at 11am, 12:15, 1:15, and 2:15pm. Tickets cost A$12 (US$9.60) for adults, A$10 (US$8) for seniors, A$6 (US$4.80) for children under 15, and A$30 (US$24) for families. Buy tickets on board. You can stop en route and rejoin a later tram if you like.

Fraser Ave. off Kings Park Rd. ✆ **08/9480 3659** information kiosk, or 08/9480 3600 administration. Free admission. Park daily 24 hr. Information Kiosk daily 9:30am–4:30pm (closed Dec 25). Hours are approximate and may vary. Bus: 33 stops outside the Information Kiosk and extends into the park on Sat afternoon, and much of the day Sun and public holidays. Red CAT's Stop 26 (Havelock St.) is 1 block north of the gates.

**Perth Mint** ★ This lovely historic building—built in the 1890s to mint currency from the Kalgoorlie gold rush—produced the victors' gold medals for the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games. Bullion is still traded here. The key event is a gold pour demonstration (on the hour 10am–3pm weekdays, and 10am–noon on weekends and public holidays). You can also see samples of the 2000 Olympics medals, engrave a medallion with your own message, handle a 400-ounce gold bar, see gold coins being minted, and ogle the country's biggest collection of nuggets. A 30-minute free guided tour departs half an hour before every pour. A shop sells gold coins and nugget jewelry.

310 Hay St. (at Hill St.), East Perth. ✆ **08/9421 7223.** www.perthmint.com.au. Admission A$6.50 (US$5.20) adults, A$5.50 (US$4.40) seniors and students, A$3.30 (US$2.65) children. Shop admission free. Mon–Fri 9am–4pm; Sat–Sun and holidays 9am–1pm. Closed Jan 1, Good Friday, Apr 25 (Anzac Day), and Dec 25. Bus: Red CAT Stop 10 (Perth Mint).

**Perth Zoo** *Kids* This is a good place to see kangaroos, koalas, numbats, wombats, quokkas, emus, echidnas (the Aussie answer to the porcupine), dingoes, snakes, frogs, and just about every other kind of Aussie wildlife, mostly housed in natural habitats, or in a walk-through aviary. There are plenty of exotic animals, including orangutans, Rothschild's giraffes, zebras, lions, rhinos, and elephants. Feeding demonstrations and talks run throughout the day. You can do a behind-the-scenes tour and buy paintings by the zoo's elephants. Koala cuddling is not permitted; for that, head to Cohunu Koala Park (see above).

20 Labouchere Rd., South Perth. ✆ **08/9474 3551** for recorded information, or 08/9474 0444 administration. Admission A$16 (US$13) adults, A$8 (US$6.40) children 4–15, A$43 (US$34) families of 4. Daily 9am–5pm. Ferry: Barrack St. Jetty to Mends St. Jetty, South Perth. Bus: 30 or 31.

### *Moments* Picture Perfect

For the only photo of Perth you'll need, snap the view over the city and river from the War Memorial in Kings Park—it's superb day or night.

**Western Australian Museum** *Kids* Kids will like the dinosaur gallery, the drawers full of insects, the blue whale skeleton on the well-stocked aquatic zoology floor, the "megamouth" shark preserved in a tank in the ground in the courtyard, and assorted other examples of Australia's weird natural creatures. The main attraction for grown-ups is one of the best collections of Aboriginal artifacts and rare photographs in the country. Allow 90 minutes to see most highlights.

Francis St. at Beaufort St. (or enter off James Street Mall), Northbridge. ✆ **08/9427 2700.** Free admission; donation requested. Fee may apply for temporary exhibitions. Daily 9:30am–5pm. Closed Good Friday, Dec 25, and until 1pm Apr 25 (Anzac Day) and Dec 26. Train: Perth. Bus: Blue CAT to Stop 7 (Museum).

## HITTING THE BEACHES

Perth shares Sydney's good luck in having beaches in the metropolitan area—19 of them, in fact, along the 35km (22-mile) Sunset Coast from Cottesloe in the south to Quinns Rocks in the north. Mornings are best as a strong afternoon wind, known as the "Fremantle Doctor," can be unpleasant, especially in summer. Always swim between the red and yellow flags, which denote a "safe swimming" zone.

A walk/cycle path runs along 15 beaches from Sorrento Beach in the north down to Port Beach on Fremantle's outskirts in the south. It veers inland for a few kilometers at Swanbourne, where it also cuts out for a few blocks; you should easily pick it up again.

During summer (the last Sat in Sept to the last Sun in Apr), bus nos. 400 and 408 run to Scarborough Beach every 15 minutes each day. Bus no. 458 stops half-hourly on weekends and public holidays and hourly on weekdays at most beaches from Fremantle to Hillarys. It operates in both directions. You can take a surfboard under 1.2m (3 ft. 10 in.) on these buses.

All beaches have ample parking. The three most popular are:

**COTTESLOE** This pretty crescent, graced by the Indiana Tea House restaurant (see "Great Deals on Dining," above), is Perth's most fashionable beach. It has safe swimming, a small surf break, and a kiosk. There are a couple of cafes nearby. Train: Cottesloe, then a walk of several hundred meters. Bus: 102.

**SCARBOROUGH** Biggest of them all, Scarborough's white sands stretch for kilometers from the base of the Hotel Rendezvous Observation City Perth. Swimming is generally safe, and surfers are always guaranteed a wave, although inexperienced swimmers should take a rain check when the surf is rough. The busy shopping precinct across the road means there's always somewhere to buy lunch and drinks. Bus: 400.

**TRIGG** Surfers like Trigg best for its consistent swells. It has a kiosk. Bus: 400 to Scarborough, then a 10-minute walk north.

## A DAY OUT IN FREMANTLE

The heritage port precinct of **Fremantle,** 19km (12 miles) from downtown Perth on the mouth of the Swan River, is probably best known outside Australia as the site of the 1987 America's Cup challenge. Just before that, the city embarked on a major restoration of its gracious but rundown warehouses and Victorian buildings. Today "Freo" is a bustling district of 150 National Trust buildings, alfresco cafes, museums, galleries, pubs, markets, and shops in a well-preserved historical atmosphere. It's still a working port, so you will see fishing boats unloading and yachts gliding in and out of the harbor. The ambience is so authentic that locals make a beeline for the place every weekend, resulting in a hubbub of buzzing shoppers, market stall-holders, java

drinkers, yachters, tourists, and fishermen. Allow a full day to take in even half the sights—and don't forget to knock back an ale or two on the veranda of one of the gorgeous old pubs.

## ESSENTIALS

**GETTING THERE** Parking is plentiful, but driving can be a pain, as many of the streets are one-way. Most attractions are within walking distance, so take the train to Fremantle station and explore on foot (or hop on the free CAT bus; see below).

A nice way to get to the port and see Perth's suburbs at the same time is on cruises run by several companies once or twice a day from the Barrack Street Jetty. See "Whale-Watching Cruises, Tram Trips & Other Tours," below, for cruise operators.

**GETTING AROUND** The silver Fremantle CAT bus makes a running loop of local attractions every 10 minutes Monday through Friday from 7:30am to 6:30pm, and on weekends and holidays from 10am to 6:30pm, except Good Friday and December 25 and 26. It is free and departs from the train station.

**Fremantle Trams** (✆ **08/9339 8719**)—an old tram carriage on wheels, not tram tracks—conducts various tours that last 45 or 90 minutes. I found the commentary uninteresting and hard to follow, but this is a fun way to see a lot in a short time if you don't want much real information about what you're seeing. The tours depart from Fremantle Town Hall 10 times a day starting at 10am, with the last tour at 4pm. Tickets cost A$10 and A$15 (US$8–US$12) adults, A$9 and A$14 (US$7.20–US$11) seniors, and are free for children under 16 traveling with two adults. The popular Friday night Ghostly Tour includes a fish and chips dinner and admission to a range of attractions. It costs A$35 (US$28) adults and A$30 (US$24) children under 15. You must book in advance for Friday nights but not for other tours, and your ticket will include discount admission to Fremantle Prison.

**VISITOR INFORMATION** The **Fremantle Tourist Bureau** is in Town Hall, Kings Square (at High St.), Fremantle, WA 6160 (✆ **08/9431 7878;** www.fremantlewa.com.au). It's open Monday through Friday from 9am to 5pm and Saturday 10am to 3pm. The best website is that of the Fremantle Council, www.fremantle.wa.gov.au.

## SEEING THE SIGHTS IN FREMANTLE

You will want to explore some of Freo's museums and other attractions below, but take time to stroll the streets and admire the 19th-century offices and warehouses, many now painted in rich, historically accurate colors. As soon as you arrive, wander to the docks—either **Victoria Quay,** where sailing craft come and go, or **Fishing Boat Harbour** off Mews Road, where the boats bring in their catches.

Freo's best **shopping** is for arts and crafts, from hand-blown glass to Aboriginal art to alpaca-wool clothing. Worth a look are the assorted art, crafts, and souvenir stores on **High Street** west of the mall; the **E Shed markets** on Victoria Quay (Fri–Sun and Mon holidays 9am–6pm); and **Bannister Street CraftWorks,** 8–12 Bannister St. (✆ **08/9336 2035**), an arts cooperative where you often spy the artists at work (Tues–Sun 11am–5:30pm, public holidays 1–5:30pm). The 170 stalls at the **Fremantle Markets,** 74 South Terrace at Henderson Street (✆ **08/9335 2515**), sell cheap imported handicrafts, jewelry, housewares, and clothing, as well as inexpensive food. They're open Friday from 9am to 9pm, Saturday from 9am to 5pm, and Sunday and Monday holidays from 10am to 5pm.

The most popular watering holes are the **Sail & Anchor,** 64 S. Terrace (✆ **08/9335 8433**), which has its own brewery; the **Norfolk,** 47 South Terrace at Norfolk Street

(✆ **08/9335 5405**); and the beautifully restored front bar and garden courtyard at **Phillimore's Café & Bar** at His Majesty's Hotel, on Phillimore Street at Mouat Street (✆ **08/9335 9596**). The happening "cappuccino strip" on South Terrace is good for people-watching.

**Fremantle Arts Centre** Housed in a striking neo-Gothic 1860s building built by convicts, this center contains one of Western Australia's best contemporary arts and crafts galleries, with a constantly changing array of works. A shop sells crafts from Western Australia, a bookstore stocks Australian art books and literature, and the courtyard cafe is the perfect place to hang out. Free concerts play on the lawn every Sunday and public holiday between September and May from 2 to 4pm. Also here is the Fremantle History Museum (see the next listing).

1 Finnerty St. (at Ord St.). ✆ **08/9432 9555.** Free admission. Daily 10am–5pm. Closed Jan 1, Good Friday, and Dec 25–26.

**Fremantle History Museum** ★ Located in a convict-built former asylum that also houses the Fremantle Arts Centre (see above), this small but densely packed museum uses lots of old photographs and personal possessions to paint a realistic picture of what life was like for Fremantle's first settlers, the Aborigines they displaced, and later generations up to the present day.

1 Finnerty St. (at Ord St.). ✆ **08/9430 7966.** Free admission; donation requested. Sun–Fri 10:30am–4:30pm; Sat and public holidays 1–5pm. Closed Jan 1, Good Friday, and Dec 25–26.

**Fremantle Prison** ★ Even jails boasted attractive architecture back in the 1850s. This limestone jail, built to house 1,000 inmates by convicts who no doubt ended up inside it, was a maximum-security prison until 1991. Take the 75-minute main tour to see cells re-created in the style of past periods of the jail's history, bushranger (highwayman) Joe Moondyne's "escape-proof" cell, the gallows, the workshops, the chapel, the hospital, the jailers' houses, and cell walls featuring some wonderful artwork by the former inmates. The ticket price includes an additional 45-minute tour (the precinct tour) that visits the other areas, including the women's prison and commissariat, hourly after the main tour. The 90-minute **candlelight tours** ★, which take place only on Wednesday and Friday, must be booked in advance.

1 The Terrace. ✆ **08/9336 9200.** www.fremantleprison.com. Free admission to prison precinct and visitor center. Tours A$15 (US$12) adults, A$12 (US$9.60) seniors and students, A$7.50 (US$6) children 4–15, A$40 (US$32) families of 5. Candlelight tour A$19 (US$15) adults, A$15 (US$12) seniors and students, A$10 (US$8) children, A$50 (US$40) families. Daily 10am–6pm. Main tours every 30 min. 10am–5pm. Precinct tours every hour 11:30am–4:30pm. Candlelight tours Wed and Fri 7pm winter, 7:30pm summer. Closed Good Friday and Christmas.

**The Roundhouse** This 12-sided jail is the oldest public building in the state (built in 1831). There are few displays, but it's worth a visit for history's sake, and for the sea views on the other side. The time cannon, just to its west, is a replica of a gun salvaged from an 1878 wreck. The cannon is fired and a **time ball** dropped at 1pm daily, just as it was in the 1800s, from a deck overlooking the ocean. You might be that day's honorary gunner chosen from the crowd! The Roundhouse is a short walk from the Fremantle train station. You can also walk through the Whalers Tunnel to Bathers Beach. Volunteer guides are on hand to explain it all.

10 Arthur Head (enter over the railway line from High St.). ✆ **08/9336 6897.** Admission by gold coin donation, A$1 or A$2 (US80¢ or US$1.60). Daily 10:30am–3:30pm. Closed Good Friday and Dec 25.

**Shipwreck Galleries** The massive hulk of the Dutch ship ***Batavia,*** wrecked north of Perth in 1629, will stop you in your tracks as you enter one of the first displays in this fascinating museum. The *Batavia*'s story is of survival and betrayal; most of the survivors of the wreck were massacred by a handful of mutineers. You will love the tales of old wrecks and displays of pieces of eight, glassware, cannons, and other deep-sea treasure recovered off the Western Australian coast. The museum is renowned for its work in maritime archaeology. Displays date from the 1600s, when Dutch explorers became the first Europeans to encounter Australia.

Cliff St. ✆ **08/9431 8444.** Free admission; donation required. Daily 9:30am–5pm. Closed Good Friday, Dec 25, and until 1pm Apr 25 (Anzac Day) and Dec 26. Free tours daily 10, 11am, 2, 3pm (check at reception).

**Western Australian Maritime Museum** ★★ I could (and did) spend hours wandering in this fascinating museum, now in a new home at the western end of Victoria Quay. The museum looks at Fremantle's history and present-day operations as a port, and has exhibits on signaling and piloting, ancient and modern navigation, current sailing technology, naval defense, sea trade, and Aboriginal maritime heritage. It also features historic and rare boats, including *Australia II* (the Aussie yacht that won the America's Cup). You can tour HMAS *Ovens,* an Oberon-class submarine, every half-hour starting at 10am. You can buy a joint ticket for the museum and sub, or just for the sub. Museum staffer Elaine Berry leads a 90-minute **Maritime Precinct Walk** for A$10 (US$8) for adults, A$7.50 (US$6) for seniors and groups of four or more, and A$3 (US$2.40) for school-age kids; book by calling the museum at ✆ **08/9431 8455.** Tours can be scheduled to suit you.

Victoria Quay, Fremantle. ✆ **08/9431 8444.** www.museum.wa.gov.au/maritime. Admission A$10 (US$8) adults, A$5 (US$4) students and seniors, A$3 (US$2.40) children 5–15, A$22 (US$18) for families of 6. Admission to submarine only A$8 (US$6.40) adults, A$3 (US$2.40) children 5–15, A$22 (US$18) families. Joint ticket A$15 (US$12) adults, A$8 (US$6.40) students and seniors, A$5 (US$4) children, and A$35 (US$28) families. Daily 9:30am–5pm; 1–5pm on Anzac Day (Apr 25) and Boxing Day (Dec 26). Closed Good Friday and Dec 25. Bus: Fremantle CAT to Stop 25 (Maritime Museum).

## WHALE-WATCHING CRUISES, TRAM TRIPS & OTHER TOURS

**Boat Torque Cruises** (✆ **08/9421 5888**), **Golden Sun Cruises** (✆ **08/9325 9916**), and **Oceanic Cruises** (✆ **08/9325 1191**) run an assortment of morning, afternoon, sunset, luncheon, dinner, and half- and full-day cruises on the Swan River. Some go as far as Fremantle and to historic homes and vineyards in the Swan Valley. Oceanic Cruises offers a lunch cruise to see wild sea lions at Carnac Island, just off Fremantle. The cruise from Perth costs A$99 (US$79) adults, A$89 (US$71) children 13 to 17, A$59 (US$47) kids 4 to 12 (less from Fremantle). **Captain Cook Cruises** (✆ **08/9325 3341**) also runs cruises on the Perth-Fremantle route; it offers an Aboriginal cultural cruise that includes a guided bushland walk that costs A$37 (US$30) adults, A$33 (US$26) seniors and students, and A$20 (US$16) kids 4 to 14. Lunch costs A$18 (US$14) more.

From September through November, Perth's waters are alive with southern right and humpback **whales** returning from the north with their calves. To join a 2- or 3-hour jaunt to watch them, contact Boat Torque Cruises or Oceanic Cruises. Departure days and times vary from year to year with every cruise operator, so check ahead. Prices range from A$30 (US$24) to around A$50 (US$40), and about half-price for kids.

**AQWA,** the Aquarium of Western Australia (✆ **08/9447 7500;** see "What to See & Do in Perth," earlier in this chapter, for more information), runs whale-watching tours on Wednesdays, weekends, and public holidays during the season (Oct to early

Dec) at 9 and 11:30am. Each tour is limited to 12 people, so advance bookings are essential. The cost, A$90 (US$72) per person, includes admission to AQWA.

The **Perth Tram Co.** (✆ **08/9322 2006**) makes a daily loop of the city, the casino, and Kings Park in replica 1899 wooden trams; hop on and off as you wish. Tickets, which you buy on board, cost A$15 (US$12) for adults, A$13 (US$10) for seniors, A$7 (US$5.60) for children under 15, and A$37 (US$30) for families. City-casino, city–Kings Park, and casino–Kings Park single legs are also available. Join anywhere; the tram starts at 565 Hay St. at 9:40am and makes six narrated 90-minute loops a day.

**Feature Tours** (✆ **1800/999 819** in Australia, or 08/9475 2900; www.ft.com.au) runs half- and full-day coach tours to attractions in and around Perth.

## OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES & SPECTATOR SPORTS

**BIKING** Bike tracks run along the Swan River, through Kings Park, and down to the beaches. There is a great 9.5-km (6-mile) track around Perth Water, the broad expanse of river in front of the CBD, that starts at the Swan River on Riverside Drive in the city and goes over the Causeway Bridge, back along the other bank, and over the bridge at the Narrows. The state Department of Transport's cycling division, **Bikewest,** publishes bike route maps to the city. They are available in bike shops, most newsdealers, and at the **Perth Map Centre,** 900 Hay St. (✆ **08/9322 5733**).

An hour's rental with **Koala Bike Hire,** in the parking lot behind Fraser's restaurant in Kings Park (✆ **08/9321 3061**), is A$5 (US$4), or A$16 (US$13) for the day, which includes a helmet (required by law in WA), lock, and maps of Kings Park.

**CANOEING, KAYAKING & WHITE-WATER RAFTING** **Rivergods** (✆ **08/9259 0749;** www.rivergods.com.au) runs canoeing, sea kayaking, and whitewater rafting adventures on the Swan and other rivers. The company's 1-day sea kayak trip to snorkel and swim with wild sea lions in the Shoalwater Islands Marine Park, just south of Perth, gets rave reviews. You also see penguins being fed on Penguin Island. The cost for the day is A$125 (US$100). This trip runs daily from September to June.

**FISHING** Dhufish, pink snapper, cod, marlin, shark, tuna, and mahimahi run in the ocean off Perth. **Mills Charters** at Hillarys Boat Harbour, about 25km (16 miles) north of the city center (✆ **08/9246 5334;** www.millscharters.com.au), runs full-day deep sea fishing trips aboard a 70-foot cruiser for A$138 (US$110) per person, or A$180 (US$144) for two people sharing a line. That includes tackle and bait; BYO lunch and drinks. Another great fishing spot is Rottnest Island (see "Side Trips from Perth," below). **Rottnest Malibu Diving** (✆ **08/9292 5111**) rents tackle for beach and jetty fishing, and does fishing tours to the pick of the island's bays in winter months.

**GOLF** Most convenient to the city is Burswood Park Golf Course, part of the **Burswood International Resort Casino,** across the river on the Great Eastern Highway, Burswood (✆ **08/9362 7576** for the pro shop). A 9-hole round is just A$17 (US$14) weekdays and A$20 (US$16) weekends. A cart for 9 holes is A$22 (US$18), and club rental is A$17 (US$14). Even more scenic are the 27 championship fairways designed by Robert Trent Jones, Jr., at **Joondalup Resort,** Country Club Boulevard, Connolly, a 25km (16-mile) drive north of Perth (✆ **08/9400 8811** pro shop); and **The Vines** in the Swan Valley (✆ **08/9297 3000** for the resort, or 08/9297 0777 for the pro shop), which has two 18-hole bushland courses. Joondalup was ranked the No. 1 Resort Golf Course in Australia by *Golf Australia* magazine in 2005. Kangaroos often come onto both courses. You'll pay around A$40 (US$32) for 9 holes or A$99

(US$79) for 18 holes weekdays at Joondalup, A$140 (US$112) on Saturday, and A$109 (US$87) on Sunday, including use of a buggy. At The Vines, fees are around A$35 to A$45 (US$28–US$36) for 9 holes and A$60 to A$70 (US$48–US$56) for 18 (or A$85–A$93/US$68–US$74 on weekends, depending on which course you choose). Add A$22 (US$18) per person for a buggy.

**SAILING** The tallest tall ship in Australia, the three-masted barquentine **STS *Leeuwin II*** (✆ **08/9430 4105;** www.leeuwin.com), sails from B Shed at Victoria Quay, Fremantle, when it is not out on voyages around Australia. You may be one of up to 40 passengers, but you still get the chance to try your hand at sailing the way it used to be done. The ship takes 3- or 4-hour sails in the mornings and afternoons, and at sunset on weekends. The cost is A$66 (US$53) adults or A$33 (US$26) children 12 and under, or A$59 (US$47) for adults and A$33 (US$26) children for sunset sails. Offered less often, "full day" sails run from 10am to 3pm and cost A$99 (US$79) for adults and A$55 (US$44) for children. Experienced sailors can sometimes find a spot in Thursdays' summer twilight events with members of the **Royal Perth Yacht Club,** Australia II Drive, Crawley (✆ **08/9389 1555;** ask for the sailing administrator), if there is a place available. It's not spinnaker sailing, so the action is at an easy pace. All-white dress standards apply.

**SCUBA DIVING & SNORKELING** Rottnest Island's corals, reef fish, and limestone caverns, in 18-to-35m (59–128-ft.) visibility, are a gift from heaven to Perth divers and snorkelers. Contact **Rottnest Malibu Diving** (✆ **08/9292 5111**) on Rottnest Island (see "Side Trips from Perth," below) to rent gear or join a dive trip.

**SURFING** You will find good surfing at many city beaches—Scarborough and Trigg, in particular. See "Hitting the Beaches," earlier in this chapter. Rottnest Island (see "Side Trips from Perth," below) also has good waves. **Murray Smith Surf Centre,** Shop 14, Luna Maxi Mart, Scarborough (✆ **08/9245 2988**), rents long boards for A$20 (US$16) for half a day or A$30 (US$24) for the full day, plus a refundable A$100 (US$80) deposit. It also rents body boards. **Surfing WA** (✆ **08/9448 0004**) runs surfing classes for A$50 (US$40) per person per hour for groups of up to eight people. It gets cheaper the bigger your group is. Boards, wet suits, and sunscreen are provided.

## SPECTATOR SPORTS

**AUSTRALIAN RULES FOOTBALL (AFL)** Perth's Aussie Rules team, the **West Coast Eagles,** is based at Subiaco Oval, 171 Subiaco Rd., Subiaco. Book tickets through **Ticketmaster 7** (✆ **1300/136 122** in Australia; www.ticketmaster7.com) or the stadium (✆ **1300/135 915** in Australia). The season runs from March to August; most games play Friday and Saturday nights and Sunday afternoons.

**CRICKET** **Nelson Crescent,** East Perth (✆ **08/9265 7222;** www.waca.com.au), is the playing ground for the Western Australian Cricket Association, or WACA (pronounced "Whacker" by loving fans). The field is host to major matches over the November-to-March season. Games range from an afternoon to 5 days and are played mostly by day, occasionally at night. Tickets cost as little as A$8 (US$6.40) for many lesser matches and go up to about A$50 to A$60 (US$40–US$48) for the big matches. Tickets for some matches can be bought at the gates, but book seats to international matches through **Ticketmaster 7** (✆ **1300/136 122** in Australia).

## THE SHOPPING SCENE

Perth's city center is a major retail precinct. Most shops are located on the parallel Hay Street and Murray Street malls, located 1 block apart, and in the network of arcades running off them such as the Plaza, City, and Carillon City arcades. **London Court** off Hay Street Mall is a re-created Tudor street lined with one-off fashion, gift, and jewelry shops. Off Murray Street Mall on Forrest Place is the **Forrest Chase shopping center** housing the Myer department store and boutiques on two gallery levels. Add to your collection of international designer brands on posh **King Street.**

If you want to avoid the chains, skip the city center and spend half a day in **Subiaco** or "Subi," where Hay Street and Rokeby Road are lined with smart boutiques, home accessories shops, art galleries, cafes, antiques shops, and markets. The Colonnade shopping center at 388 Hay St. showcases groovy young Aussie fashion designers in its Studio 388 section. Fremantle's shopping is mostly limited to a good selection of crafts, markets, and Aboriginal souvenirs.

Shops are open until 9pm on Friday in the city, and until 9pm on Thursday in Subiaco and Fremantle.

### ABORIGINAL ART & CRAFTS

**Creative Native,** 32 King St. (✆ **08/9321 5470**), stocks Perth's widest range of Aboriginal arts and crafts. Upstairs is a gallery selling original works by some renowned Aboriginal artists. There's another branch at 65 High St., Fremantle (✆ **08/9335 7438**).

**Indigenart,** 115 Hay St., Subiaco (✆ **08/9388 2899**), and 82 High St., Fremantle (✆ **08/9335 2911**), stocks works on canvas, paper, and bark, as well as artifacts, textiles, pottery, didgeridoos, boomerangs, and sculpture, by world-famous and lesser-known Aboriginal artists from all over Australia.

### JEWELRY

Western Australia is renowned for farming the world's best South Sea pearls off Broome, for Argyle diamonds mined in the Kimberley, and for being one of the world's biggest gold producers. **Artisans of the Sea,** corner of Marine Terrace and Collie Street, Fremantle (✆ **08/9336 3633**), sells elegant South Sea pearl and gold jewelry.

Some of Perth's other leading jewelers, where you can buy opals, Argyle diamonds, and Broome pearls, are **Costello's,** Shop 5–6, London Court (✆ **08/9325 8588**), and **Linneys,** 37 Rokeby Rd., Subiaco (✆ **08/9382 4077**).

### *Finds* Desert Designs

Aboriginal artist **Jimmy Pike** grew up in Western Australia's Sandy Desert and was one of the first to start transferring his Dreamtime art and designs to fabrics, in 1981. He died in late 2002, but his commercial work lives on in the clothing and accessories—including cute children's gear—bearing his designs at the **Desert Designs** boutique at 114 High Street Mall, Fremantle (✆ **08/9430 4101**). For paintings and limited-edition prints by Jimmy Pike and many other Aboriginal artists, visit the **Japingka Gallery,** 47 High St., Fremantle (✆ **08/9335 8265**). It also stocks didgeridoos, artifacts, and stunning high-quality hand-tufted woolen floor rugs. Open weekdays 9:30am to 5:30pm, Saturdays 10:30am to 5:30pm.

For opals to suit all budgets, head to **Quilpie Opals,** Shop 6, Piccadilly Arcade off Hay Street Mall (✆ **08/9321 8687**).

## PERTH AFTER DARK

***Scoop*** (www.scoop.com.au), available at newsdealers for A$8.90 (US$7.10), is a good source of information on festivals and concerts, performing arts, classical music, exhibitions, and the like. Your best guide to dance clubs, rock concerts, gig listings, art-house cinemas, theater, and galleries is the free weekly ***X-press*** magazine available at pubs, cafes, and music venues every Thursday. The ***West Australian*** and ***Sunday Times*** newspapers publish some listings, including cinema guides.

Two major booking agents handle most of the city's major performing arts, entertainment, and sporting events: the performing arts-oriented **BOCS** (✆ **1800/193 300** in Australia, or 08/9484 1133; www.bocsticketing.com.au) and the sports- and family-entertainment-oriented **Ticketmaster 7** (✆ **1300/136 122** in Australia**;** www.ticketmaster7.com). Book opera, ballet, orchestra, and the Black Swan Theatre Company (see below) through BOCS.

**THE PERFORMING ARTS** The **West Australian Opera** (✆ **08/9321 5869**) and **West Australian Ballet** (✆ **08/9481 0707**) usually perform at **His Majesty's Theatre,** 825 Hay St., a restored "grande dame" venue from the early 1900s. Perth's leading theatrical company, the **Black Swan Theatre Company** (✆ **08/6389 0311**), plays at theaters around town. The **West Australian Symphony Orchestra** (✆ **08/9326 0000**) usually performs at the **Perth Concert Hall,** 5 St. Georges Terrace, next to the Duxton Hotel. This hall has the best acoustics of any such venue in Australia; such acts as the London Philharmonic, comedian Billy Connolly, and legendary blues guitarist B. B. King have performed here.

Perth is an outdoors kinda place. In summer, look for outdoor concerts or jazz at **Perth Zoo** (✆ **08/9474 3551** for recorded information, or 08/9474 0444 administration); movies at Perth's several outdoor cinemas; and open-air concerts, plays, and movies in **Kings Park** (✆ **08/9480 3600**).

**PUBS, BARS & NIGHTCLUBS** Northbridge houses most of the city's lively pubs and dance clubs. Don't forget that Freo has good pubs, too (see "A Day Out in Fremantle," earlier in this chapter). For a trendy take on the traditional pub, head to the **Brass Monkey,** 209 William St. (at James St.), Northbridge (✆ **08/9227 9596**). Downstairs are several bars, including a wine bar serving gourmet pizzas and a beer garden. Wednesday to Saturday, head upstairs to the Glasshouse for live entertainment, including the Laugh Resort comedy club Wednesday at 8pm for a A$10 (US$8) cover. In Subiaco, suits flock to the "Subi," also known as the **Subiaco Hotel,** 465 Hay St. at Rokeby Road (✆ **08/9381 3069**), a popular historic pub with a stylish cafe, great cocktails, and live jazz on Wednesday and Saturday nights.

If your "dancing till 6am" days are over but you still know how to hit the floor, check out **Margeaux's,** a nightclub popular with the over-30s crowd, in the Parmelia Hilton, 14 Mill St. (✆ **08/9215 2000**). It's open Saturday 9pm to 3:30am.

In Fremantle, the **Metropolis,** 58 South Terrace (✆ **08/9336 1880**), is a complex of five dance floors and eight bars on several levels. It's open Friday 9pm to 5am, Saturday 9pm to 6am, and Sunday 9pm to 1am.

**THE CASINO** A 2,300-seat theater that features some major international stars is in the **Burswood International Resort Casino,** on the Great Eastern Highway just over the river from the city (✆ **08/9362 7777** for information; BOCS, see above, for

bookings). Live bands, disco, cabaret performers, or karaoke is offered nightly, and there are nine restaurants and six bars, including a nightclub. The main gaming floor has 88 tables and 1,300 gaming machines. Some of the Casino's most popular games include roulette, blackjack, and two-up. There's also a VIP players' room and a keno lounge. The 24-hour casino operates every day except Good Friday, April 25 (Anzac Day), and December 25, and is open to everyone over the age of 18. Dress code is "neat and tidy," with smarter standards after 7pm. It's about a A$16 (US$13) cab ride from the city, or take a train to Burswood station.

## 2 Side Trips from Perth

### ROTTNEST ISLAND: GETTING FACE-TO-FACE WITH THE FISHES

19km (12 miles) W of Perth

The wildlife reserve of **Rottnest Island** ★★ just off the Perth coast is like the city's own Great Barrier Reef in miniature. Its jewel-bright turquoise waters, warm currents, rocky coves, and sheltered beaches harbor coral reefs and 360 kinds of fish that make for fabulous snorkeling. You may spot humpback whales from September to December, and dolphins surfing the waves anytime. The island is also home to 10,000 quokkas, cute otterlike marsupials that reach up to your knees. A wonderful thing about Rottnest is that it's car-free. Everyone gets around by bike (or bus, if you tire of pedaling). The island is 11km (7 miles) long and 4.5km (3 miles) across at its widest point.

#### ESSENTIALS

**GETTING THERE** **Boat Torque Cruises** (✆ **08/9421 5888**) and **Oceanic Cruises** (✆ **08/9325 1191**) operate at least three times a day from Perth (trip time: about 1 hr. 45 min.), and four to seven times a day from Fremantle (trip time: about 25 min.). The **Rottnest Express ferry** (✆ **08/9335 6406**) runs four or five times a day from Fremantle only. Round-trip fares average about A$63 (US$50) from Perth, or about A$50 (US$40) from Fremantle. Boat Torque and Oceanic pick you up free from most Perth and Fremantle hotels. You pay about A$5 (US$4) more if you return on a later day. Most boat operators offer day-trip and accommodations packages.

**Rottnest Air Taxi** (✆ **1800/500 006** in Western Australia, or 08/9292 5027; www.rottnest.de) provides aerial transfers in four- or six-seater (including the pilot) aircraft. A same-day round-trip in a four-seater costs A$198 (US$158) for the whole plane. **Kookaburra Air** (✆ **08/9354 1158;** www.kookaburra.iinet.net.au) also operates a range of tours to Rottnest.

**VISITOR INFORMATION** The **Rottnest Island Visitor & Information Centre** (✆ **08/9372 9752**) is right at the end of the jetty on the island. The center is run by the **Rottnest Island Authority** (✆ **08/9432 9111;** www.rottnest.wa.gov.au). The Perth Visitor Centre (see "Visitor Information" in the "Perth" section, earlier in this chapter) also has information.

**GETTING AROUND** Ferries pull into the jetty in the main town, Thomson Bay Settlement (often just called Settlement). **Rottnest Bike Hire** (✆ **08/9292 5105**), next to the Rottnest Hotel near the jetty, rents 1,800 bikes of every size, speed, and type, as well as holders for everything from surfboards to babies. An 18-speed bike is A$20 (US$16) for a 24-hour day (plus a A$25/US$20 refundable deposit), including a helmet (compulsory in Australia) and lock. There is no need to reserve a bike.

The yellow **Bayseeker** bus does half-hourly circumnavigations, calling at 16 stops, including all the best bays. An all-day ticket costs A$7 (US$5.60) for adults, A$3.50 (US$2.80) for children 4 to 12, and A$17 (US$14) for families of 4 (extra child A$1.65/US$1.30). Buy tickets on board.

A free bus runs regularly between the airport and four of the five small communities around the island—Thomson Bay Settlement, Geordie, Fay's, and Longreach Bays. It does not run to the Basin, which is a 15-minute walk from Settlement.

## WHERE TO STAY & DINE

Call the **Rottnest Island Authority's accommodations booking service** (✆ **08/9432 9111;** www.rottnest.wa.gov.au) to book one of its 250-plus holiday homes, apartments, cabins, historic cottages, or the campground. Don't expect anything new or upscale. Water and electricity restrictions mean no accommodations are air-conditioned. Accommodations during the Western Australian summer and Easter school vacation times are allotted on a ballot system, for which you must submit an application form (see the Rottnest Island Authority's website or call ✆ **08/9432 9178**). Book well in advance at any time because accommodations are limited.

Apart from the restaurants at the hotels listed below, the tearooms, and a couple of takeout joints, your only other dining option is the excellent DOME cafe at the jetty.

Shoulder season is usually April through May, and again September through November or December. Winter is June through August.

**Allison Camping Area** The island's only camping area, located at Thomson Bay, has lots of shady trees and unpowered tent sites only. There is a shower and toilet block, and gas barbecues (fires are banned). Alcohol is not permitted, and a quiet-time rule applies from 11pm to 7am.

c/o Rottnest Island Authority, E Shed, Victoria Quay, Fremantle, WA 6160. ✆ **08/9432 9111.** Fax 08/9372 9715. www.rottnest.wa.gov.au. 50 tent sites. Tent site A$8 (US$6.40) per person per night, A$4 (US$3.20) children under 12. MC, V.

**Quokka Arms** Formerly the Rottnest Hotel, this 1864 building near the jetty began life as the state governor's summer residence and underwent a major renovation in late 2004. Now, day-trippers gather in the sports bar or the large open-air beer garden to admire the ocean views over an ale or two. The building contains pleasant, modern, motel-style rooms, some with a small patio and sea views. These are among the best hotel rooms on the island. Guests have the use of a barbecue. No smoking indoors.

Bedford Ave., Rottnest Island, WA 6161. ✆ **08/9292 5011.** Fax 08/9292 5188. www.axismgt.com.au/rottnesthotel. 18 units (all with shower only). Peak season (Dec–Jan) A$180–A$200 (US$144–US$160) double; shoulder season A$160–A$180 (US$128–US$144) double; low season A$150–A$170 (US$120–US$136) double. Extra person A$40 (US$32). Crib A$15 (US$12). Rates include continental breakfast. Ask about midweek packages. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; bar; beer garden; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* TV, fridge, no phone.

**Rottnest Youth Hostel** As well as dorm rooms, this 54-bed YHA/Hostelling International property has private family rooms furnished simply with a double bed and double bunks. In Kingstown, 1.2km (less than a mile) from Thomson Bay, it is housed in 1936 barracks that were used by the Australian Army until 1984. It serves cheap meals, provides a barbecue, and has a TV/video room with 24-hour Internet access and a fireplace. Advance bookings are essential. Linen hire is A$5 (US$4) per stay, but blankets and pillows are provided. A free bus will pick you up when you arrive.

Kingstown Barracks, Rottnest Island, WA 6161. ✆ **08/9432 9111** weekdays or 08/9372 9730 weekends and public holidays. Fax 08/9432 9315. 9 units, none with bathroom. A$47 (US$38) family room (sleeps 4); A$43 (US$34) twin or double; A$20 (US$16) per adult in a 10-bed dorm, A$9 (US$7.20) per child under 17. MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant. *In room:* No phone.

## SNORKELING, DIVING, SURFING & FISHING

Most people come to Rottnest to snorkel, swim, surf, scuba dive, or fish. As soon as you arrive, rent a bike and your preferred aquatic gear, and pedal around the coast until you come to a beach that suits you. (Don't forget to carry drinking water and food because the only shops are at Settlement.) The Basin, Little Parakeet Bay, Little Salmon Bay, and Parker Point are good **snorkel** spots. The visitor center sells maps to suggested snorkel trails. **Surfers** should try Cathedral Rocks or Strickland Bay. **Fishermen** will catch squid, salmon, and tailor, as well as all kinds of reef fish. The island's dive shop, **Rottnest Malibu Diving** (✆ **08/9292 5111**), near the jetty, rents snorkel gear, dive gear, wet suits, surfboards, body boards, aqua-bikes, and fishing tackle. The company conducts two daily trips to some of the 100-plus dive sites around Rottnest. Some feature limestone caverns and some of the island's 14 shipwrecks. A shore or boat dive with all gear included is A$60 (US$48) per person. If you have never dived before, a 1- to 2-hour theory lesson followed by a boat dive is A$200 (US$160) per person, including round-trip transport from Perth.

## FOR HISTORY BUFFS

Rottnest has quite a bit to offer history buffs, who may want to walk (45-min.), cycle, or take a train (see below) to the Oliver Hill 1930s gun emplacements, which have intact 9.2-inch guns and battery tunnels housing an engine room, a plotting room, and observation posts. You can explore the 1.5km (1-mile) heritage trail on your own (maps are at the visitor center) or take a guided 1-hour tour at 9:30am or on the hour from 11am to 2pm. The train, the *Captain Hussey,* was launched in late 2003 and takes visitors up to Oliver Hill. It departs from the station near the visitor center hourly from 10:30am to 2:30pm. The fare is A$15 (US$12) for adults, A$7.70 (US$6.15) for children 4 to 12, and A$39 (US$31) for families of four (extra child A$3.85/US$3.10), including the tour (except the last trip, which starts after the last tour).

Volunteer guides run several free 1-hour walking tours. One is a historical tour of architectural points of interest around Thomson Bay, many of which were built in the 19th century, such as the governor's residence, the chapel, the octagonal prison, the small **museum** (✆ **08/9372 9752;** daily 11am–4pm), and the former Boys' Reformatory. Another heritage trail takes you to the memorial marking de Vlamingh, the Dutch explorer who named the island Rott Enest (Rat Nest) in 1696 when he mistook

### *Tips* Island Orientation Tours

Many first-time visitors take the **2-hour Island Bus Tour** because it is a good introduction to the bays and the island's cultural and natural history—and because it includes a stop to see the quokkas. It costs A$22 (US$18) for adults, A$11 (US$8.80) for kids 4 to 12, and A$50 (US$40) for families of four (extra child A$5/US$4). Departure times vary, but you can expect them to run twice a day, around 10:30am and 1:30pm. Buy tickets from the visitor center.

quokkas for rats. There are also quokka walks, an Aboriginal historical walk, and a walk to Bathurst lighthouse.

## IN PURSUIT OF THE GRAPE IN THE SWAN VALLEY

20km (13 miles) NE of Perth

Twenty minutes from the city center of Perth is the Swan Valley, home to two of Australia's best wine labels. In all there are 30 or so wineries along with wildlife parks, antiques shops, a few arts and craft galleries, several good restaurants, and Australia's best golf resort. Some restaurants and wineries close Monday and Tuesday.

Lord Street from the Perth city center becomes Guildford Road and takes you to the historic Art Deco town of Guildford at the start of the Swan Valley. Drop into the **Swan Valley and Eastern Region Visitors Centre** is at the corner of Meadow and Swan streets, Guildford (✆ **08/9379 9400;** www.swanvalley.com.au). It's open daily except Christmas Day from 9am to 4pm. Several companies (see "Whale-Watching Cruises, Tram Trips & Other Tours," earlier in this chapter) run day tours and cruises from Perth.

### WHERE TO STAY

The Swan is close enough to Perth for a day trip, but you may want to treat yourself.

#### Worth a Splurge

**Hansons Swan Valley** ★★ Sleek and sophisticated sums up this B&B. White walls and groovy furniture a la Philippe Starck are the hallmarks of this elegant abode, created by former advertising executives Jon and Selina Hanson as the kind of B&B they would like to stay in themselves. Most rooms have king-size beds; all have bathrobes and minibars stocked with cheese, chocolates, and other goodies. Each has its own tiny courtyard or access to the upstairs balcony. Six have Jacuzzis. Start the day with hearty fare in the sunny breakfast room, wander out to enjoy bucolic views of the 10-hectare (25-acre) farm, and end it in the stylish restaurant. No smoking indoors.

60 Forest Rd., Henley Brook, WA 6055. ✆ **08/9296 3366.** Fax 08/9296 3332. www.hansons.com.au. 10 units (all with shower only). A$200–A$290 (US$160–US$232) double. Rates include full breakfast. Ask about packages. AE, DC, MC, V. Take West Swan Rd. to Henley Brook and turn right at Little River Winery onto Forest Rd.; Hansons is on the left at the end of the road. Children under 15 not accepted. **Amenities:** Restaurant (see "Where to Dine," below); small outdoor pool; limited room service; in-room massage (w/2-hr. notice); laundry service; dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV/VCR, minibar, hair dryer, iron.

### WHERE TO DINE

**Hansons** ★★ MODERN AUSTRALIAN This slick restaurant attached to Hansons Swan Valley (see "Where to Stay," above) seats 80 inside and 120 outside. You can choose from a prix-fixe blackboard menu with a glass of wine (available noon–2pm and 6:30–8:30pm) or the a la carte menu, which includes hearty fare such as twice-cooked duck with sour cherry sauce and grilled sausages made with milk-fed pork. Desserts include a wickedly "adults only" hot fudge sundae, and there's also a A$13 (US$10) kids' menu.

60 Forest Rd., Henley Brook. ✆ **08/9296 3366.** www.hansons.com.au. Reservations recommended. Main courses A$24–A$33 (US$19–US$26). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily from noon for lunch, and from 6:30pm for dinner. Take West Swan Rd. to Henley Brook and turn right at Little River Winery into Forest Rd. Hansons is on the left at the end of the road.

**Lamont Winery Cellar Door** MODERN AUSTRALIAN The cellar door kitchen serves food all day Wednesday to Sunday from a "grazing menu" that features casual fare like pizza or antipasto to eat outside at the farm tables. A gallery on the grounds shows Western Australian art and crafts.

85 Bisdee Rd. (off Moore Rd.), Millendon, near Upper Swan. ✆ **08/9296 4485.** Reservations recommended. A$8.80–A$18 (US$7.05–US$14). AE, DC, MC, V. Wed–Sun 10am–5pm. Closed Dec 25–Jan 1. Take the Great Northern Hwy. to Baskerville, near Upper Swan, take a right onto Haddrill Rd. for 1.6km (1 mile), turn right onto Moore Rd. for 1km (just over ½ mile), and make a right onto Bisdee Rd.

### TOURING THE WINERIES & OTHER THINGS TO DO

Most Swan wineries are small, family-run affairs. An exception is **Houghton Wines,** Dale Road, Middle Swan (✆ **08/9274 9540**), Western Australia's oldest, biggest, and most venerable winery. The beamed timber cellar holds old winemaking machinery, and there are lovely picnic grounds—in November, mauve jacaranda trees blossom gloriously—a cafe, and an art gallery selling works by locals. Open daily 10am to 5pm (closed Good Friday and Dec. 25). The other big-name winery is **Sandalford Caversham Estate,** 3210 W. Swan Rd., Caversham (✆ **08/9374 9374**). You may want to take its 90-minute winery tour, which takes you along walkways over the high-tech production areas. The A$18 (US$14) fee includes a tasting of premium wine and a wine-education kit. It runs three times daily. The winery also has a good gift shop, a pretty vine-covered casual dining area, and a pleasant restaurant. Both wineries' cellar doors are open daily for free tastings from 10am to 5pm.

If you have kids, call at the **Caversham Wildlife Park** (✆ **08/9248 1984**). After a move in 2003 to Whiteman Park, West Swan, the **Caversham Wildlife Park & Zoo** has smart new homes for its collection of 200 species of mostly Western Australian wildlife. You can stroke koalas (but not hold them), feed kangaroos, pet farm animals, take a camel ride, and, sometimes, cuddle joeys and wombats. It's open daily from 8:30am to 5:30pm, closed December 25. Admission is A$14 (US$11) for adults, A$10 (US$8) for seniors and students, and A$6 (US$4.80) for children 2 to 14.

Antiques lovers should browse the strip of shops on James Street, Guildford (most shops are open daily), or visit **Woodbridge,** a beautifully restored 1883 manor house on Ford Street, West Midland (✆ **08/9274 2432**). The house is open Thursday through Tuesday from 1 to 4pm; closed Good Friday, all of July, and December 25. Admission is A$5 (US$4) for adults, A$3 (US$2.40) for seniors and children under 16, and A$10 (US$8) for families of six. Its river-view tearooms serve lunch.

Drop into **Guildford Village Potters** (✆ **08/9279 9859**), 22 Meadow St. (next to the Swan Valley and Eastern Region Visitors Centre), to check out work by about 20 local women. You may find it hard to resist the raku (open-fired) glazes—I did. Open weekdays 9:30am to 3pm, weekends and holidays 9:30am to 4pm.

## YORK: TAKING A STEP BACK IN HISTORY

97km (60 miles) E of Perth

The state's first inland settlement, this peaceful National Trust–classified village on the Avon River oozes charm from an unspoiled Victorian streetscape. There are lovely B&Bs, historic buildings of stone wrapped by wrought-iron lace verandas, art galleries, a rose garden, a medley of museums including one housing a A$30-million (US$24-million) display of vintage cars, and one of the state's finest jarrah furniture shops.

**GETTING THERE** From downtown Perth, take Lord Street, which becomes Guildford Road to Midland, where it becomes the Great Eastern Highway. Follow this for 32km (20 miles) to The Lakes, then take the York turnoff right onto the Great Southern Highway for 47km (29 miles). The drive takes about 75 minutes. **Transwa** (✆ **1300/662 205** in Australia, or 08/9326 2600) runs a daily coach service from

Perth for A$12 (US$9.60) adults, half-price for children under 16, one-way. Check ahead if you plan to travel on a public holiday or during Western Australian school vacations, as schedules sometimes change then. The **York Tourist Bureau** is within the Town Hall, 81 Avon Terrace (at Joaquina St.), York, WA 6302 (✆ **08/9641 1301;** fax 08/9641 1787; www.yorktouristbureau.com.au). It's open daily 9am to 5pm.

**EXPLORING THE TOWN** Wandering the streets is the best way to soak up the charm of York's old buildings, like the restored railway station, the Town Hall built in 1911, the library, the convent, old pubs like the York and the Castle, St. Patrick's church, the Uniting Church, the Holy Trinity Church with its stained-glass windows, the fire station, and the old hospital. Among the sights worth seeing is the **York Courthouse Complex,** 124 Avon Terrace (✆ **08/9641 2072**), housing a colonial-era courtroom still in use, cells, stables, and a trooper's cottage. It's open daily from 10am to 4pm; closed January 1, December 25 and 26, Good Friday, and for the whole of February. Admission is A$3 (US$2.40) for adults, A$1.50 (US$1.20) for seniors and children under 14, and A$7.50 (US$6) for families.

It's worth the short walk out of town to the excellent **Residency Museum,** Brook Street (✆ **08/9641 1751**), for its displays of everything from prayer books, children's toys, needlework, and old kitchenware to antique furniture, farm tools, and other memorabilia of life in York in days gone by. It's open Tuesday through Thursday and holidays from 1 to 3pm, Saturday and Sunday from 11am to 3:30pm, and by appointment on public holidays. Admission is A$3 (US$2.40) for adults and A$1 (US80¢) for children ages 5 to 16.

If you visit on a weekend or public holiday in autumn or spring (usually Oct–Nov, and Apr–May), you can explore the evolution of the rose at the **Avon Valley Historical Rose Garden** (✆ **08/9641 1469**), 2km (1¼ miles) out of town on Osnaburg Road. Admission is A$4 (US$3.20) adults, free for children under 15. Of the several special-interest museums in York, the **York Motor Museum,** 116–124 Avon Terrace (✆ **08/9641 1288**), is the most spectacular. Among the 150 or so veteran, vintage, classic, and racing vehicles and motorcycles on display are the world's first car (an 1886 Benz), a 1904 Napier, and the Williams Formula 1 car in which Aussie Alan Jones won the world championship in 1980. The museum is open daily from 9:30am to 3pm. Admission is A$6 (US$4.80) for adults, A$5 (US$4) for seniors, and A$3 (US$2.40) for children under 12.

Take a peek at the superb craftsmanship at **Jah-Roc the Mill Gallery** (✆ **08/9641 2522**) in the wonderful Old Flour Mill on Broome Street, even if you can't afford tens of thousands of dollars for a dining table handcrafted from a single slab of recycled jarrah. Open daily from 10am to 5pm.

## WHERE TO STAY

**Hillside Country Retreat** ★ *Finds* The romantic rooms in this gracious historical homestead were all refurbished in 2003. Each individually furnished room has a potbelly wood stove, and you get treated to fresh flowers in your room, complimentary port, sherry, chocolates, and a daily newspaper. You can choose between a room in the homestead or one in the rustic mud-brick servants' quarters. Breakfast is served in the quaint teahouse in the garden. No smoking indoors. Pets are welcome. Owners Andrew and Joy Savage also offer self-contained accommodations in two cottages in York.

30 Forrest St., York, WA 6302. ✆ **08/9641 1065** or 0416/121 392. www.hillsideretreat.com.au. 4 units (3 with shower only). A$120–A$180 (US$96–US$144) double. AE, MC, V. Rates include full breakfast. Pets welcome. **Amenities:** Small outdoor pool; tennis courts; golf course nearby; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV/VCR, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer.

## NEW NORCIA: A TOUCH OF EUROPE IN AUSTRALIA

132km (83 miles) N of Perth

It's the last thing you expect to see in the Australian bush—a Benedictine monastery town with European architecture, a fine museum, and a collection of Renaissance art—but New Norcia is no mirage. Boasting a population of 55 (when everyone's at home, that is), this pretty town and the surrounding 8,000-hectare (19,760-acre) farm were established in 1846 by Spanish Benedictine missionaries. Visitors can tour chapels with beautiful frescoes, marvel at one of the finest religious art collections in Australia, stock up on famous New Norcia nutcake straight from the monastery's 120-year-old wood-fired ovens, and attend prayers with the 15 monks who live here.

**GETTING THERE** New Norcia is an easy 2-hour drive from Perth. From downtown, take Lord Street, which becomes Guildford Road, to Midland, and follow the Great Northern Highway to New Norcia. The **Public Transport Authority** (**PTA; ✆ 1300/662 205** in Western Australia, or 08/9326 2000; www.transwa.wa.gov.au) runs a coach from Perth on Sunday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday for A$16 (US$13) one-way. Day tours from Perth are available. There is no train service.

Conference groups can book the town solid, so reserve accommodations and tours in advance, especially in wildflower season from August through October. You can get information at the **New Norcia Tourist Information Centre,** New Norcia, WA 6509 (**✆ 08/9654 8056;** www.newnorcia.wa.edu.au), in the Museum and Art Gallery, off the highway behind St. Joseph's, beside the Trading Post and Roadhouse. It keeps the same hours as the museum (see below).

### WHERE TO STAY

St. Benedict's rules of hospitality are paramount in this town. This means that part of the monastery is open to guests, usually those who are looking for a quiet, reflective place to stay and don't mind abiding by a few rules. The accommodations are spartan, and the cost is a donation (A$50/US$40 per person per day is suggested). Call the guesthouse (**✆ 08/9654 8002**) to book. For others, the hotel (see below) is the best bet.

**New Norcia Hotel** When they thought a Spanish royal visit to New Norcia was imminent in 1926, the monks built this hotel fit for, well, a king. Sadly, the royals never materialized, and the building was used for parents visiting children boarding at the town's colleges. In 1955, it became a hotel. The grand central staircase, soaring pressed-metal ceilings, and imposing Iberian facade hint at its former splendor. The rooms are very simple but comfortable. About 5 years ago, they gained new carpets, curtains, and beds. Only one has a private bathroom, air-conditioning, and a TV. It's nice to eat a meal at the bar or the charmingly faded dining room downstairs and to wander out of your room to sit on the massive front veranda upstairs. Breakfast is available for A$11 (US$8.80) continental or A$18 (US$14) cooked; kids eat for half-price. The bar gets jumping on Friday and Saturday nights when local farmers come to town. No smoking.

Great Northern Hwy., New Norcia, WA 6509. **✆ 08/9654 8034.** Fax 08/9654 8011. www.newnorcia.wa.edu.au/hotel.htm. 17 units, 1 with bathroom. A$77 (US$62) double without bathroom; A$90 (US$72) double with bathroom. Extra person A$15 (US$12). AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C (in 1 room), TV (in 1 room), fridge, coffeemaker, iron, no phone.

### EXPLORING THE TOWN & MONASTERY

The New Norcia Tourist Information Centre's 2-hour **walking tours** are a must. Tickets cost A$13 (US$10) for adults, A$5.50 (US$4.40) for children 12 to 17, and are

free for children under 12. Tours depart daily (except Dec 25) at 11am and 1:30pm, and allow time for you to attend prayers with the monks if you wish. The guide leads you around some of the town's 27 National Trust–classified buildings and gives insight into the monks' lifestyle. You will also see the frescoes in the old monastery chapel and in St. Ildephonsus's and St. Gertrude's colleges. Much of the monastery is closed to visitors, but the tour does show you the fruit gardens and a glimpse of the men-only courtyard. Heritage walking-trail maps (A$3.30/US$2.65), available at the Tourist Information Centre, include buildings not on the tour, such as the octagonal apiary.

The **Museum and Art Gallery** ★ is full of relics from the monks' past—old mechanical and musical instruments, artifacts from the days when New Norcia was an Aboriginal mission, gifts to the monks from the queen of Spain, and an astounding collection of paintings by Spanish and Italian artists, dating to the 1400s. Give yourself at least an hour here. The museum and gallery are open daily August through October from 9:30am to 5pm, and November through July from 10am to 4:30pm (closed Dec 25). Admission is A$6.50 (US$5.20) for adults, A$5.50 (US$4.40) for seniors and students, and A$2 (US$1.60) for children 6 to 12. Don't leave the gift shop without some of the famous New Norcia nutcake, made at the monastery bakery.

Apart from joining the monks for 15-minute prayers in the monastery chapel five times a day (noon and 2:30pm are the most convenient for day visitors), you can join them for Mass in the Holy Trinity Abbey Church Monday through Saturday at 7:30am and on Sunday at 9am, or daily at 5:30pm for vespers.

## 3 Margaret River & the Southwest: Wine Tasting & Underground Wonders ★

Margaret River 290km (181 miles) S of Perth

Say "Margaret River" to Australians and their eyes light up as they reply "great wine!" The area's 42 wineries nestle among statuesque forests of karri, the world's third-tallest tree. The wineries contribute only around 1% of Australia's wine output, yet they turn out some 10% of the country's top-notch premium wines. Not even most Aussies know about the Southwest's other drawing cards—like the spectacular surf breaks on the 130km (81-mile) coast from Cape Naturaliste in the north to Cape Leeuwin on the southwest tip of Australia; the coastal cliffs, perfect for abseiling (rappelling) and rock climbing; and the honeycomb of limestone caves filled with stalagmites and stalactites. Whales pass by June through December; wildflowers line the roads August through October; and wild birds, kangaroos, and shingle-backed lizards are everywhere. If you like hiking, pack your boots because there are plenty of trails, from a 15-minute stroll around Margaret River township to a 6-day **Cape-to-Cape trek** ★ along the sea cliffs. The Southwest is one of Australia's last great wildernesses.

Like wine regions the world over, the Southwest has its fair share of B&Bs, arts and crafts galleries, and some super restaurants. Plan to stay at least 2 days.

### ESSENTIALS

**GETTING THERE** It's a 3½-hour drive to Margaret River from Perth; take the inland South Western Highway (the quickest route) or the tad more scenic Old Coast Road to Bunbury, where you pick up the Bussell Highway to Margaret River.

**Air Australia** (✆ **08/9332 5011;** www.airaustralia.net) operates charter flights from Perth's Jandakot airport and a Busselton–Margaret River air taxi service twice a day on weekdays for about A$140 (US$112) per person one-way. **Leeuwin Estate**

winery (✆ **08/9430 4099;** www.leeuwinestate.com.au) arranges charter flights from Perth for A$280 (US$224) per person, including flight, tour and tastings, and lunch in the restaurant.

**Southwest Coachlines** (✆ **08/9324 2333**) runs daily service, and two trips on weekends and public and Western Australian school holidays, to Margaret River from Perth for about A$31 (US$25). The **Public Transport Authority** (**PTA; ✆ 1300/602 205** in Western Australia, or 08/9326 2600; www.transwa.wa.gov.au) runs coach service from Perth twice daily Sunday through Friday. It takes about 5½ hours. You can also connect to this coach service in Bunbury by taking the twice-daily *Australind* train from Perth to Bunbury—it shaves travel time down to a bit over 4½ hours. Fares are A$31 (US$25) with either mode. Schedules can differ on a public holiday or during Western Australian school vacations. There is no train service.

**VISITOR INFORMATION** You will pass many wineries before you get to Margaret River township, but it's worth heading first to the **Margaret River Visitor Centre** to pick up a winery guide. It's at 100 Bussell Hwy. (at Tunbridge St.), Margaret River, WA 6285 (✆ **08/9757 2911;** www.margaretriverwa.com). It is open daily from 9am to 5pm; closed December 25.

**GETTING AROUND** Nine kilometers (5½ miles) past Busselton, which marks the start of the Southwest, the Bussell Highway makes a sharp left and heads south among the wineries through Vasse. It continues 25km (16 miles) on through the tiny village of Cowaramup, 11km (7 miles) farther through Margaret River proper, and 43km (27 miles) on to windswept Cape Leeuwin and the tiny fishing port of Augusta, on Australia's south coast.

A car is close to essential. **Hertz** (✆ **13 30 39** in Australia, or 08/9758 8331) has an office in Margaret River, or call **Avis** (✆ **1800/679 880** in Australia for reservations in the Southwest, or 800/230-4898 in the U.S.). For a taxi, call **Margaret River Taxi Service** (✆ **13 10 08** in Australia, or 08/9757 3444).

Several companies run sightseeing and winery tours from Margaret River or Perth.

## WHERE TO STAY

**Margaret River** is the best place to stay in the Southwest because it has all the amenities, like banks, a supermarket, restaurants, and shops. The blink-and-you'll-miss-it hamlet of **Cowaramup,** 11km (6¾ miles) north of Margaret River township, is close to wineries and has a general store, a cafe, and one or two interesting crafts shops. **Vasse** is a tiny settlement at the northern edge of the Southwest, 36km (23 miles) north of Margaret River. Some places may require a minimum 2-night stay on weekends.

### IN MARGARET RIVER

**The Rosewood Guesthouse** Set on half an acre of beautiful English-style gardens, this charming house was refurbished in 2005 by new owners Jane and Keith Purdie, who have furnished it with a pleasing blend of antiques, modern furniture, and artworks. Rooms are tastefully appointed and several have their own internal entry foyers, adding spaciousness. All rooms have views of the gardens. The Grand Spa suite offers apartment-styled accommodations suited to travelers wanting to self-cater and has extra touches such as a CD player. The guest lounge has a log fire during winter and the verandas are shady on a summer day. Breakfast is a delicious feast of local produce prepared with flair. Expect peaches to be brandied, pears poached in red wine and melon in green ginger syrup. The signature waffles are served with maple syrup

and cream. It is a short walk to Margaret River's restaurants and shops. No smoking and no children under 14. A maximum of 12 guests stay at any time.

54 Wallcliffe Rd., Margaret River, WA 6285. ✆ **08/9757 2845.** Fax 08/9757 3509. www.rosewoodguesthouse.com.au. 6 units (4 with shower only). A$115–A$165 (US$92–US$132) double; A$145–A$215 (US$116–US$172) suite. Extra person A$25 (US$20). Rates include continental breakfast. Ask about packages. MC, V. No children under 14. **Amenities:** Tour desk; guest laundry. *In room:* A/C (in 2 rooms), TV, kitchenette (apt only), fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, no phone.

### IN COWARAMUP

**The Noble Grape** English cottage gardens surround this recently built colonial-style B&B. Each well-maintained room is motel-like but homey and welcoming, with a modern bathroom, a comfy sitting area, and a small rear patio opening onto bird-filled trees. One is suitable for travelers with disabilities, and a family unit with two bedrooms sleeps five. Although you're on the highway here, the rooms are quiet. Hair dryers are at reception. No smoking indoors.

Lot 18, Bussell Hwy., Cowaramup, WA 6284. ✆/fax **08/9755 5538.** www.noblegrape.com.au. 6 units (all with shower only). A$115–A$150 (US$92–A$120) double; A$15 (US$12) child under 12. Extra person A$25 (US$20). Rates include continental breakfast. Ask about packages. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Coin-op laundry; nonsmoking rooms; 1 room for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* TV, fridge, coffeemaker, no phone.

### IN VASSE

**Newtown House** Set in lavender and rose gardens nice for lazing in after a hard day's wine tasting, this National Trust–listed 1851 homestead has four pretty rooms with "contemporary country" decor, furnished with wrought-iron table and chairs, pine furniture, and cute touches like potpourri "dream sacks" on your pillow. All have ceiling fans. The fixings for a gourmet continental breakfast are sent up to your room the night before, and you can choose to dine in the excellent restaurant (see "Where to Dine," below) on a special rate between Tuesday and Saturday. No smoking indoors.

Bussell Hwy. (9km/5½ miles past Busselton), Vasse, WA 6280. ✆/fax **08/9755 4485.** www.newtownhouse.com.au. 4 units (all with shower only). A$150–A$300 (US$120–US$240) double. Rate includes breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. The property is on the right, just after the Bussell Hwy. turns left (south). Children not permitted. **Amenities:** Restaurant; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* TV, minibar, coffeemaker, no phone.

## WHERE TO DINE

Many wineries also serve light meals, which can be accompanied by some of what you've sampled. Good restaurants attached to wineries include those at Vasse Felix, Amberley Estate, Driftwood Estate, and Brookland Valley Vineyard. Of these, **Leeuwin Estate,** Stevens Road, Margaret River (✆ **08/9430 4099**), is probably the best. You can also stock up for a picnic at the supermarket in Margaret River. Cape Mentelle and Vasse Felix both have green shady **picnic areas** beside a brook.

### WORTH A SPLURGE

**Newtown House** ★★ MODERN FRENCH/AUSTRALIAN The Southwest boasts some of the best restaurants in Australia, and this is one of 'em. Folks come from far and wide to savor chef Stephen Reagan's dishes, such as rare local venison with celeriac and roast garlic, baked quince and a shiraz *jus.* Desserts are no letdown—caramel soufflé with lavender ice cream and hot caramel sauce is a favorite. Located in a historic homestead, the restaurant consists of two simple, intimate rooms with sisal matting and contemporary, boldly colored walls. Even better, it's BYO (corkage is A$3.50/US$2.80 per person). You can also drop by for morning or afternoon tea.

737 Bussell Hwy. (9km/5½ miles past Busselton), Vasse. ✆ **08/9755 4485.** Reservations recommended, especially at dinner. Main courses A$33–A$35 (US$26–US$28). AE, DC, MC, V. Tues–Sat 10am–10:30pm or later.

**Wino's** ★★ *Finds* MODERN AUSTRALIAN Tapas, tastes, and terrific atmosphere. This gets my vote for the best place to eat in Margaret River. You can sit in the buzzing bar or head to the quieter restaurant section. I went for the tapas plates and "bar grits"—sardines wrapped in prosciutto with caper berries and *gremolata,* duck-liver parfait with orange reduction, and octopus salad. Small pizzas come with toppings like sweet potato, pimento, and feta; anchovy, olives, and chiles; and salami, red onion, and rocket pesto. You order wine by the "taste," glass, or bottle. In the restaurant, there's heartier fare, such as confit of duck and venison *osso buco.* Contemporary art and sculpture enliven the atmosphere, and there's outdoor seating. The friendly staff completes the picture.

85 Bussell Hwy., Margaret River. ✆ **08/9758 7155.** Reservations recommended. Main courses A$12–A$29 (US$9.60–US$23); tapas and bar grits A$3.70–A$8.60 (US$2.95–US$6.90); bar pizzas A$12 (US$9.60). AE, MC, V. Daily 11am–late.

## TOURING THE WINERIES

Fans of premium wines will have a field day in the Southwest. Cabernet sauvignon and merlot are the star reds, while chardonnay, semillon, and sauvignon blanc are the pick among whites. Most wineries offer free tastings daily from 10am to 4:30pm.

The "big three" are **Cape Mentelle,** 4km (2½ miles) west of Margaret River on Wallcliffe Road (✆ **08/9757 0888**); **Leeuwin Estate** ★, Stevens Road, Margaret River (✆ **08/9430 4099**); and **Vasse Felix,** Caves Road at Harman's Road South, Cowaramup (✆ **08/9756 5000**). Leeuwin Estate has a towering reputation, especially for chardonnay. It does winery tours three times a day. A relative newcomer, **Voyager Estate,** Stevens Road, Margaret River (✆ **08/9757 6354**), has exquisite rose gardens around a South African Cape Dutch–style cellar and does a highly drinkable shiraz grenache. Other labels to look for are Arlewood Estate, Cullen Wines, Evans & Tate, Fermoy Estate, Lenton Brae, Pierro, and Sandalford Wines.

## WHAT ELSE: CAVES, BUSH TUCKER & MORE

Six of the Southwest's 350 or so limestone caves are open to the public. Some contain elaborate stalactite formations. Before or after you visit, stop at **CaveWorks** eco-interpretive center, Lake Cave, Caves Road, 15km (9 miles) south of Margaret River's Wallcliffe Road (✆ **08/9757 7411**). It's open daily except December 25 from 9am to 5pm.

### *Tips* Special Events in the Southwest

Every February or March, **Leeuwin Estate Winery** (✆ **08/9430 4099;** www.leeuwinestate.com.au) stages an **outdoor concert** ★ starring some leading showbiz light (past performers included Sting, k. d. lang, Shirley Bassey, Julio Iglesias, and Diana Ross, among others) and usually a major orchestra, attended by 6,000 picnicking guests. Tickets are about A$110 (US$88). This is a big local event, so book months ahead.

The **Margaret River Wine Region Festival** (✆ **08/9759 9990;** www.mrwinefest.org.au) runs 4 days each November, with more than 40 wineries and restaurants taking part. Wine and food events for the enthusiastic novice or the wine connoisseur are matched with jazz, blues, classic, and headline concert acts (usually in the vineyards); celebrity chef cooking classes; and tours of art studios, regional cheese farms, and olive groves.

### Tips Taking Wine Home with You

Most wineries don't deliver internationally, so the place to buy wine if you want to take it out of Australia is the **Margaret River Regional Wine Centre,** 9 Bussell Hwy., Cowaramup (✆ **08/9755-5501;** www.mrwines.com). It stocks about every local wine; does daily tastings of select vintages; and sells maps, visitor guides, and winery guides. The expert staff will help you make your choices and even tailor your day's foray. It is open Monday through Saturday from 10am to 8pm, and Sunday from noon to 6pm (closed Good Friday, Dec 25, and sometimes Jan 1). You can also order through the website.

Admission is free if you tour Lake, Jewel, or Mammoth cave, otherwise A$3 (US$2.40) for adults, A$2 (US$1.60) for children 4 to 15.

**Lake Cave,** right outside CaveWorks and 300 steps down an ancient sinkhole, contains a tranquil pond that reflects the exquisite stalactites. Four kilometers (2½ miles) north along Caves Road is **Mammoth Cave,** where you can see the fossilized jaw of a baby *Zygotaurus trilobus,* an extinct giant wombat. **Jewel Cave,** 8km (5 miles) north of Augusta on Caves Road, is the prettiest. Tours of Lake and Jewel and self-guided tours (using a CD audio system) of Mammoth each cost A$17 (US$14) for adults, A$7.50 (US$6) for children 4 to 16, A$46 (US$37) for families of four. A Grand Tour Pass to all three plus CaveWorks saves you a little money. Mammoth is open from 9am to 5pm (last tour at 4pm); tours of Lake and Jewel run hourly from 9:30am to 3:30pm. Sometimes extra tours are scheduled during school vacations. The caves are open every day except December 25. Book tours through CaveWorks.

Calgardup and Giants caves, run by the state's Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM), are more challenging. The caves are not electrically lit, and there are no guides. Visitors receive helmets, lamps, and information, and may spend as long as they like exploring. **Calgardup Cave** goes to a depth of 27m (81 ft.) and has boardwalks to help negotiate it. Calgardup is on Caves Road, about 12 minutes' drive south of Margaret River and 3 minutes north of the Conto's Road turnoff. It is open daily from 9am to 4:15pm. **Giants Cave,** 20 minutes south of Margaret River on Caves Road, is one of the largest and deepest caves on the Leeuwin-Naturaliste Ridge. It is 575m (1,725 ft.) long and about 86m (258 ft.) deep. It's open 9:30am to 3:30pm on school and public holidays, and some other times. Admission to Calgardup or Giants costs A$10 (US$8) adults and A$5 (US$4) children, including helmets and lamps. Buy tickets at the **National Park Information Centre** (✆ **08/9757 7422**) at Calgardup Cave. The center also has walking maps and information on camping sites and activities in the Leeuwin-Naturaliste National Park.

Another "adventure cave" where you get down and dirty crawling on your hands and knees—in the protective clothing supplied—is **Ngilgi Cave,** Caves Road, Yallingup (✆ **08/9755 2152**), for A$70 (US$56) for anyone over 15. A guided tour departs daily at 9:30am and takes about 3 hours. Book 24 hours ahead. Ngilgi's main chamber has translucent stalactite "shawls," which anyone can explore on a semi-guided tour (guides are available to answer questions and explain points of interest but do not conduct visitors through the caves). This costs A$15 (US$12) for adults, A$6 (US$4.80) for children 5 to 17, or A$42 (US$34) for families, and runs half-hourly from 9:30am to 3:30pm (4pm during school vacations, 5pm during Christmas school

vacations). Flashlight tours cost A$18 (US$14) adults and A$12 (US$9.60) children (minimum A$140/US$112 group). The cave is open every day except December 25.

You can pick your own kiwifruit, raspberries, and other fruit at **The Berry Farm,** 222 Bessell Rd. outside Margaret River (✆ **08/9757 5054**), or buy attractively packaged sparkling, dessert, and port wines; jams; and vinegars. The farm is open daily 10am to 4:30pm (closed Christmas Day, Boxing Day, New Year's Day, and Good Friday).

Try to make time for a tour offered by **"Bushtucker Woman" Helen Lee** ★ (✆ **08/9757 1084,** or 0419/911 971 mobile; www.bushtuckertours.com). On one tour, she has you canoeing up the river; exploring a cave; and eating smoked emu, grub pâté, and other Aboriginal delicacies on a river island. It runs daily from 9:45am to 2pm and costs A$50 (US$40) for adults and A$30 (US$24) for kids under 16. Her winery tour has an alternative bent incorporating short karri-forest walks, insights into organic winemaking, tastings of up to 40 wines at five or six wineries, a visit to Leeuwin Estate's herb garden, and a gourmet lunch at a local winery. She'll teach you things like how vaporized peppermint oil from the native trees condenses on the grapes to create the distinctive flavor of Margaret River whites. The 6-hour tour departs daily at 11am and costs A$60 (US$48) per person.

**Surfing lessons** ★ from four-time Western Australian professional surfing champion **Josh Palmateer** (✆ **08/9757 3850,** or 0418/958 264 mobile) are a must! Two-hour lessons in the gentle surf at Rivermouth Beach (they will pick you up and take you to the beach) run daily and cost A$100 (US$80) for a private lesson or A$40 (US$32) per person if you join a group, including use of wet suits and boards. Lessons run September through June. They also rent boards and wetsuits, if you are already a Master of the Surf Universe and want to try legendary Smiths Beach, the Three Bears (Mama, Papa, and Baby) break at Yallingup, the double-barreled North Point at Gracetown, or the plentiful breaks at Prevelly Park.

From June through December, **whales** play offshore along the coast. There is a whale lookout near the Cape Naturaliste lighthouse. Daily 3-hour whale-watching cruises with **Naturaliste Charters** ★ (✆ **08/9755 2276;** www.whales-australia.com) depart June through August from Augusta (where you'll also see fur seals and often dolphins). September through December, cruise departures switch to Dunsborough,

### *Moments* Scenic Drives & a Spectacular View

The picturesque 106km (66-mile) north-south drive along Caves Road, the length of the Southwest from Busselton in the north, to Augusta on Cape Leeuwin in the south, is worth doing. Don't miss **Boranup Drive** ★, a scenic detour off Caves Road through towering karri trees—although your rental car is not insured on its unpaved surface! It departs Caves Road 6km (3¾ miles) south of Mammoth Cave and rejoins it after a 14km (8¾-mile) meander. Near Augusta, a sweeping ocean view—which sometimes even includes seals, whales, and dolphins—awaits those who climb to the top of **Cape Leeuwin** lighthouse. It is open every day except Christmas from 8:45am to 5pm. Tours are run every 30 minutes from 9am to 4:30pm from mid-September to late April, and every 40 minutes from May to mid-September. Admission is A$10 (US$8) for adults and A$5 (US$4) for children.

where whales rest their calves. The boat is fitted with an underwater camera connected to a TV and a hydrophone, so you can see and hear the creatures. Cruises cost A$48 (US$38) for adults, A$42 (US$34) for seniors and students, and A$27 (US$22) for children 4 to 12, A$140 (US$112) for families of four, and free for children under 4.

Arts and craft galleries are thick on the ground in the Southwest. One of the most upscale is **Gunyulgup Galleries,** Gunyulgup Valley Drive near Yallingup (✆ **08/9755 2177**), which has top-of-the-line jewelry, glass, ceramics, and artworks. Open daily 10am to 5pm.

## 4 The Goldfields

595km (372 miles) E of Perth

After Paddy Hannan struck gold in 1893, the wheat-belt town of Kalgoorlie found itself sitting on the "Golden Mile," at the time the richest square mile of gold-bearing earth in the world. Today Kalgoorlie (pop. 33,000) is still an Outback boomtown, a mixture of yesteryear charm and 21st-century gold fever. The town is literally perched on the edge of the **Super Pit,** the world's biggest open-cut gold mine, currently 4.5km (3 miles) long, 1.5km (1 mile) wide, and 290m (951 ft.) deep. It yields around 20,000 kilograms (44,000 lb.) of the yellow stuff every year—a mere 53 kilograms (117 lb.) a day. An estimated 850,000 kilograms (1.9 million lb.) is still in the ground. Hardly surprisingly, Kalgoorlie Consolidated Gold Mines, which operates the pit, is Australia's biggest gold producer.

Walking down the streets fronted with wrought-iron lace verandas is like stumbling onto a Western movie set. Countless bars still do the roaring trade they notched up in the 1890s, only now they serve gold-mining executives from Adelaide and Perth.

Life on the Golden Mile is not so lively for everyone, however. Just down the road 39km (24 miles) is **Coolgardie** (pop. 1,400), another 1890s gold rush boomtown where the gold ran out in 1963. The town's semi-abandoned air is a sad foil to Kalgoorlie's brash energy, but much of her lovely architecture remains. The thing to do here is just wander the gracious streets for a pleasant nostalgia buzz.

### ESSENTIALS

**GETTING THERE** **Qantas** (✆ **13 13 13** in Australia, or 800/227-4500 in the U.S. and Canada) flies to Kalgoorlie from Perth daily. **Skywest** (✆ **1300/660 088** in Australia; www.skywest.com.au) flies from Perth daily.

**Greyhound Australia** (✆ **13 20 30** in Australia, or 07/4690 9950) makes the 8-hour trip once a week from Perth for A$127 (US$102). Greyhound's service from Adelaide runs once a week, takes around 27 hours, and costs A$284 (US$227). **Goldrush Tours** (✆ **1800/620 440** in Australia, or 08/9021 2954) runs 6¾-hour express coach service from Perth Sunday through Friday for A$55 (US$44) adults, A$39 (US$31) children under 15.

Kalgoorlie is a stop on the 3-day ***Indian Pacific*** train service, which runs between Sydney and Perth through Adelaide twice a week in both directions. See section 17, "Getting Around Australia," in chapter 2 for contact details. The ***Prospector*** train makes nine trips a week from Perth to Kalgoorlie for A$68 (US$54) adults, A$34 (US$27) kids 5 to 15. Contact the **Public Transport Authority** (✆ **1300/602 205** in Western Australia, or 08/9326 2600; www.transwa.wa.gov.au).

From Perth, take the Great Eastern Highway. If you want to make the 2,182km (1,364-mile) journey on the Eyre Highway from Adelaide, which features the longest

straight stretch of highway in the world on the mind-numbingly empty Nullarbor Plain, contact the South Australian or Western Australian state auto clubs listed under "Getting Around Australia" in chapter 2 for advice. There are only a handful of small towns and gas stops en route.

**VISITOR INFORMATION** The **Kalgoorlie Goldfields Visitor Centre,** 250 Hannan St., Kalgoorlie, WA 6430 (✆ **1800/00 GOLD** in Australia, or 08/9021 1966; www.kalgoorlie.com/tourism), dispenses information on Kalgoorlie, Coolgardie, and outlying ghost towns and regions. The center's inexpensive walking-trail map to the town's architecture is worth buying. The center is open Monday through Friday from 8:30am to 5pm and Saturday, Sunday, and public holidays from 9am to 5pm. The **Coolgardie Tourist Bureau,** 62 Bayley St., Coolgardie, WA 6429 (✆ **08/9026 6090**), is open daily from 9am to 5pm.

**GETTING AROUND** **Avis** (✆ 08/9021 1722), **Budget** (✆ 08/9093 2300), **Europcar** (✆ 08/9022 4922), **Hertz** (✆ 08/9093 2211), and **Thrifty** (✆ 08/9021 4722) have offices in Kalgoorlie.

Local tour operators will take you prospecting in outlying regions. They also offer coach and four-wheel-drive tours of Kalgoorlie, Coolgardie, and outlying ghost towns. Tours range from half a day to several days.

## WHERE TO STAY

The **Kalgoorlie Goldfields Visitor Centre** offers a free accommodations booking service (✆ **08/9021 1966;** fax 08/9021 2180; kbtc@emerge.net.au).

### All Seasons Plaza Hotel

This serviceable hotel is located right in the middle of town, close to the major attractions like the Mining Hall of Fame. The rooms are quiet, modern, clean, and a good size; some "business rooms" have a desk and all have a balcony. There are also barbecue facilities if you feel inclined to cook for yourself.

45 Egan St., Kalgoorlie, WA 6430. ✆ **1300/66 6565** in Australia, 800/221-4542 in the U.S. and Canada, 020/8283 4500 in the U.K., 0800/44 4422 in New Zealand, or 08/9021 4544. Fax 08/9091 2195. www.accorhotels.com.au. 100 units (with shower only). A$133–A$149 (US$106–US$119) double; A$183 (US$146) suite. One child under 16 stays free in parent's room w/existing bedding. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor pool; tour desk; car-rental desk; room service (6–9:30am, 7–9:30am weekends, and 1–10pm); laundry service; dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV w/free in-house movies, dataport, minibar, coffeemaker.

## WHERE TO DINE

### Akudjura ✯ MODERN AUSTRALIAN

The Italianate outdoor terrace under sailcloth, timber floors, curved silver bar, and blond-wood furniture make this Kalgoorlie's first groovy restaurant. The bright young waitstaff provides snappy service from a long and stylish menu featuring items like chicken Caesar salad, smoked salmon fettuccine, kangaroo steak, and seafood dishes (yep, even in the desert) like Tasmanian salmon in citrus and cilantro dressing. Lighter fare is available outside meal hours.

418 Hannan St. (next to Hannan's View Motel). ✆ **08/9091 3311.** Reservations recommended. Main courses A$13–A$32 (US$10–US$26); lunch averages A$13 (US$10). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 7am–10pm.

## TOURING A GOLD MINE & OTHER ADVENTURES

As you might guess, gold is a common thread running through many of the town's attractions. One of the best is the **Mining Hall of Fame** (✆ **08/9026 2700;** www.mininghall.com), Broad Arrow Road, 6km (3¾ miles) north of the Kalgoorlie Goldfields Visitor Centre on the Goldfields Highway. Opened in late 2001, it has five interactive galleries focusing on modern high-tech mining. Find out how prospecting

is done, learn how the business of mining is conducted, go underground in an old mine, pan for gold, watch a gold pour, see a video in a re-created miner's tent, and pore over an extensive collection of mining memorabilia, machinery, and huts in a miners' village. It's open daily from 9am to 4:30pm, except January 1 and December 25 and 26. Admission for aboveground activities only is A$15 (US$12) for adults, A$12 (US$9.60) for seniors and students, A$8 (US$6.40) for children, and A$35 (US$28) for families. If you want to join the underground tour, too, the prices are A$20 (US$16) adults, A$16 (US$13) seniors and students, A$12 (US$9.60) children, and A$50 (US$40) families. Underground tours and gold panning start four times a day, more often during school holidays. To get there, join a tour or jump in a taxi—walking and cycling are not advised. Allow half a day to see everything.

The **WA Museum Kalgoorlie-Boulder,** 17 Hannan St. (✆ **08/9021 8533**), is worth a look; you'll see the first 400-ounce gold bar minted in town, nuggets and jewelry, and historical displays. It is open daily from 10am to 4:30pm, closed Good Friday and December 25. Admission is free (donation requested). Tours are at 11am and 2:30pm. Allow an hour.

Don't leave town without ogling the **Super Pit** open-cut mine—it makes giant dump trucks look like ants. The lookout is at Outram Street in Boulder, off the Goldfields Highway. It's open daily from about 6am to about 7pm, but may be temporarily closed during the daily blast; check the time with the visitor center. Admission is free.

Another reminder of the days when miners spent their spare time trying for riches of another kind by indulging in two-up (a simple game involving betting on a penny landing heads or tails) can be found about 12km (7½ miles) north of Boulder on the Goldfields Highway. The original shanty that housed the **Bush Two-Up School** still stands, but the only place to try it yourself is Sheffields restaurant in the **Recreation Hotel,** Burt St. (at Lionel St.), Boulder (✆ **08/9093 3467**), which runs two-up games on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday at 4:30pm. You must be 18 or over to play.

The **Royal Flying Doctor Service** (✆ **08/9093 7500**) base at Kalgoorlie-Boulder Airport is open for visitors to browse memorabilia, see a video, and look over an aircraft (if one is in). It is open Monday through Friday from 10am to 3pm. Admission is by donation. Tours run on the hour and take 45 minutes.

Full-blood Aborigine Geoffrey Stokes of **Yamatji Bitja Aboriginal Bush Tours** ★ (✆ **08/9021 5862,** or 0407/378 602 mobile) grew up the Aboriginal way in the bush. On his full-day four-wheel-drive tours, you'll forage for bush tucker, learn bushcraft, and do things like eat witchetty grubs, cook kangaroo over a fire, or track emus. Tours cost A$200 (US$160) for two people (the minimum party size), A$80 (US$64) for extra adults, half-price for kids 4 to 12. Geoff also offers twilight campfire evenings and overnight or longer tours in the bush.

Kalgoorlie's—and maybe Australia's—most unusual attraction must be **Langtrees 181,** 181 Hay St. (✆ **08/9026 2181**), a working brothel styled into a sex industry museum in the heart of Kalgoorlie's (in)famous red-light district. For the most part housed in red and pink corrugated-iron sheds festooned with colored lights, this neck of town is a popular drive-by spot among the blue-rinse bus-tour set, who get a kick out of returning the cheery waves of the workers standing in their doorways. Ninety-minute tours, fun rather than sleazy, of some of the 12 themed rooms cost A$35 (US$28). Tours begin at 1, 3, and 6pm daily.

## EXPLORING COOLGARDIE

Wandering **Coolgardie's** quiet streets, which are graced with historic facades, is a stroll back in time. More than 100 signboards throughout the town, many with photos, detail what each site was like at the turn of the 20th century. The **Goldfields Exhibition,** 62 Bayley St. (✆ **08/9021 1966**), tells the town's story in a lovely 1898 building once used as the mining warden's courthouse. (The Coolgardie Tourist Bureau is also here.) Admission is A$3.30 (US$2.65) for adults, A$2.75 (US$2.20) for seniors, A$1.10 (US88¢) for children under 16, and A$7.70 (US$6.15) for families. It's open daily except December 25 from 9am to 5pm.

The **Railway Station Museum** (✆ **08/9026 6388**) in Woodward Street, houses gold rush and transport memorabilia in the original 1896 station building and the engine, two carriages, and the guard's van of a turn-of-the-20th-century steam train. It's open daily (except Wed) 10am to 4pm (closed Christmas, Boxing Day, and Good Friday). Admission is by donation.

If you like period architecture and interiors, browse the restored National Trust–owned **Warden Finnerty's Residence** (✆ **08/9026 6028**) on McKenzie Street off Hunt Street. It was built in 1895 for the mining warden. It's open daily (except Wednesdays) 11am to 4pm. Admission is by gold coin donation.

The **Coolgardie Camel Farm,** 4km (2½ miles) west of Coolgardie on the Great Eastern Highway (✆ **08/9026 6159**), leads rides through the bush on the mode of transport they used in the goldfields in the old days—camels. It operates only during school and public holidays.

## 5 The Midwest & the Northwest: Where the Outback Meets the Sea

The Midwest and Northwest coasts of Western Australia are treeless, riverless semi-desert occupied by vast sheep stations and a handful of people. Temperatures soar to over 115°F (46°C) in summer, and the Outback sand burns orange in the blazing sun. But it's not the land you come here for—it's what's in the sea. Since the 1960s, a pod of **bottle-nosed dolphins** has been coming into shallow water at **Monkey Mia** ★, the World Heritage–listed Shark Bay Marine Park, to greet humans. Their presence has generated worldwide publicity and drawn dolphin lovers from all over.

Another 872km (545 miles) by road north on the Northwest Cape, adventure seekers from around the world come to snorkel with awesome whale sharks—measuring up to 18m (59 ft.) long—every fall (Mar to early June). The Cape's parched shore and green waters hide an even more dazzling secret though—a second barrier reef 260km (163 miles) long and 2km (1½ miles) wide called Ningaloo Marine Park. It protects 250 species of coral and 450 kinds of fish, dolphins, mantas, whales, and turtles in its 5,000 sq. km (1,640 sq. miles). Even the Great Barrier Reef can't beat **Ningaloo Reef**'s ★ proximity to shore—just a step or two off the beach delivers you into a magical underwater garden. What is so amazing about the reef is not that it is here, but that so few people know about it—a mere 8,000 tourists visit each year. To you, that means beaches pretty much to yourself, seas boiling with marine life humans haven't scared away, unspoiled scenery, and a genuine sense of the frontier.

The Midwest and Northwest are lonely, remote, and really too hot to visit between November and March, when some tour operators close down on account of the heat. The best time to visit is April to October, when it is still warm enough to swim, though snorkelers might want a wetsuit from June through August. Both regions are

too far south to get the Top End's Wet season, so humidity is always low. Facilities are scarce and distances are immense in this neck of the woods, so be prepared.

## SHARK BAY (MONKEY MIA)

853km (533 miles) N of Perth; 1,867km (1,167 miles) S of Broome

Monkey Mia's celebrity dolphins may not show on time—or at all—but they rarely pass up a visit. Apart from these delightful sea mammals, Shark Bay's waters heave with fish, dolphins, turtles, the world's biggest population of dugongs (10,000 at last count), manta rays, sea snakes, and, June through October, humpback whales. On the tip of the Peron Peninsula, which juts out into the Shark Bay Marine Park, is **Francois Peron National Park.** The park is home to many endangered species, white beaches composed entirely of shells, and "living fossils"—rocklike structures called stromatolites that are Earth's first life. The bay's only town is the one-time pearling town of **Denham** (pop. 500), 129km (80 miles) from the main coastal highway, which has a hotel, a bakery, a newsdealer, and a few fishing-charter and tour operators. There is no settlement, only the pleasant but basic Monkey Mia Dolphin Resort (p. 474).

### ESSENTIALS

**GETTING THERE** **Skippers Aviation** (✆ **1300/729 924** in Australia; www.skippers.com.au) flies five times a week from Perth to Shark Bay Airport (also called Monkey Mia Airport), 18km (11 miles) from Monkey Mia Dolphin Resort. The fare is A$362 (US$290), cheaper for advance-purchase tickets. The **Shark Bay Airport Bus** (✆ **08/9948 1358**) meets every flight and transfers you to Monkey Mia Dolphin Resort for A$8 (US$6.40) per person one-way.

There is no train to Shark Bay. **Greyhound Australia** (✆ **13 14 99** in Australia, or 07/4690 9950) travels daily from Perth and Broome. These services connect three times a week at the Overlander Roadhouse at the Shark Bay turnoff on the North West Coastal Highway. The trip from Perth costs A$98 (US$78) and takes about 12 hours. From Broome it costs A$218 (US$174) and takes about 26 hours through featureless landscape—not recommended.

Beware of wildlife on the lonely, uninteresting 9- to 10-hour drive from Perth, and keep the gas tank full. From Perth, take the Brand Highway 424km (263 miles) north to Geraldton, then the North West Coastal Highway for 280km (174 miles) to the Overlander Roadhouse. Turn left onto the Denham-Hamelin Road and follow it for 152km (94 miles) to Monkey Mia, which is 27km (17 miles) past Denham. If you want to break the journey, the **All Seasons Inn Geraldton,** Brand Highway, Geraldton, WA 6530 (✆ **08/9921 2455**), has smart, clean motel rooms, with work desks and minibars. Rates are A$105 (US$84) double; specials are available most nights. With miles of white sandy beaches and a variety of historical sites to visit, the hotel is a convenient base from which to enjoy wildflower country. It also has a relaxed restaurant and bar, swimming pool, free in-house movies, and a children's playground.

Numerous coach, four-wheel-drive, and aerial tours run from Perth. **World Heritage Tours and Travel** (✆ **1800/645 022** in Australia, or 08/9581 5666; book through www.visitwa.com.au) offers a wide range.

**Feature Tours** does 24-hour "express" overnight coach tours from Perth. **Kookaburra Air and Complete Aviation Services** do aerial day trips and multiday tours from Perth. These companies' contact details appear in "Exploring the State," earlier in this chapter.

**VISITOR INFORMATION** Wide-ranging ecological information on Shark Bay Marine Park, Francois Peron National Park, and Hamelin Pool Marine Nature Reserve, as well as details on local tours, are available at the **Monkey Mia Dolphin Information Centre** (✆ **08/9948 1366**) in Monkey Mia Dolphin Resort (see "Where to Stay & Dine," below). Videos run throughout the day, and researchers (who are mostly from American universities) give free talks and slide shows most nights. The state's Department of Conservation and Land Management (✆ **08/9948 1208;** www.calm.wa.gov.au) runs the center. The official information outlet is the **Shark Bay Tourist Bureau,** 71 Knight Terrace, Denham, WA 6537 (✆ **08/9948 1253;** www.sharkbay.asn.au), which is open daily from 8am to 5pm (until 6pm in winter), though you will probably find the Monkey Mia Visitor Centre just as helpful.

Admission to the **Monkey Mia Reserve,** in which Monkey Mia Dolphin Resort is located, is A$6 (US$4.80) adults, A$2 (US$1.60) children under 16, and A$12 (US$9.60) families. Resort guests as well as day-trippers pay this fee.

There are ATMs at the **Heritage Resort,** 73 Knight Terrace (at Durlacher St.), Denham (✆ **08/9948 1133**), and the local supermarket, but no banks. A banking agency is in the post office in Denham.

**GETTING AROUND** **Shark Bay Car Hire** (✆ **08/9948 1247**) delivers cars and 4WDs to the airport and the resort from its Denham office. Several companies offer tours to all the main attractions.

## WHERE TO STAY & DINE

### Monkey Mia Dolphin Resort

Set right on the beach the dolphins visit, this oasis of green lawns and palms doubles as a town settlement, and is the only place to stay at Monkey Mia (all other accommodations are 27km/17 miles away, in Denham). The beachside Dolphin Lodge and backpacker lodge opened in 2004. The 24 motel-style beachside units at the front of the Dolphin Lodge offer a more upmarket option than was previously available. Each has a king-size bed, private bathroom, and hair dryer. Ground-floor units open right onto the dolphin beach, and first-floor units have balconies. The backpacker lodge, with its own Monkey Bar and large communal kitchen, is behind the Dolphin Lodge. It holds four- and seven-bed dormitories as well as shared and family rooms with bathrooms. The new accommodations complement the existing villas (which sleep 3–5 people); air-conditioned demountable (portable cabin) "park homes" with cooking facilities; and caravan and camping sites. The pleasant open-sided all-day restaurant overlooks the sea; the resort has a minimarket, an Internet cafe, and a dive shop; and you can hire a kayak or boat. Most tours in the area depart from here. A 1.5km (1-mile) nature trail leads from the resort.

Monkey Mia Rd., Shark Bay (P.O. Box 119, Denham, WA 6537). ✆ **1800/653 611** in Australia, or 08/9948 1320. Fax 08/9948 1034. www.monkeymia.com.au. 57 powered caravan sites, 20 tent sites; 13 park homes, 6 with bathroom; 60 villas; 24 motel units (all with shower only). A$9 (US$7.20) per person tent site; A$19 (US$15) per person in backpacker dorm; A$87–A$96 (US$70–US$77) park home for up to 4; A$156–A$173 (US$125–US$138) double or triple Garden Villa; A$198 (US$158) double or triple Beachfront Villa; A$173 (US$138) double Dolphin Lodge. Extra person A$11 (US$8.80). Linen A$11 (US$8.80) per person per stay in park homes and trailers. Weekly rates available. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; takeout cafe; 2 bars; outdoor pool; 2 outdoor tennis courts; Jacuzzi (fed by naturally warm underground water); free use of snorkel gear; tour desk; car-rental desk; massage; babysitting; coin-op laundry. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, kitchenette, coffeemaker, hair dryer (in some).

## MEETING THE DOLPHINS

At 7am guests at Monkey Mia Dolphin Resort are already gathering on the beach in quiet anticipation of the dolphins' arrival. By 8am three or more dolphins usually

show, and they come and go until the early afternoon. Because of the crowds the dolphins attract (about 40 people a session in low season, busloads in high season), a park ranger instructs everyone to line up knee-deep in the water as the playful swimmers cruise by your legs. You may not approach them or reach out to pat them (research shows dolphins veer away from people trying to pat them, anyhow), but they do come up to touch people of their own accord sometimes. Sometimes the dolphins even offer you a fish as a present! Feeding times are different each day so the dolphins won't become dependent on the food. Once the crowd disperses, savvy swimmers dive into the water just up the beach outside the no-swimmers-allowed Dolphin Interaction Area because the dolphins may head there after the "show." Apart from the Monkey Mia Reserve admission fee, there is no charge to see the creatures.

### A GREAT SEA-LIFE CRUISE, LIVING "FOSSILS" & MORE

Don't do what so many visitors do—see the dolphins, then shoot back to Perth. Stay to see Shark Bay's incredible marine life on the sailing catamaran ***Shotover*** (✆ **1800/241 481** in Australia, or 08/9948 1481). During a 2½-hour dugong cruise, you will see a huge range of creatures, possibly hammerhead sharks, a baby great white, sea snakes, turtles, dolphins, and, of course, dugongs. Every passenger is given polarized sunglasses, which help you spot underwater animals. Sometimes you see dozens of dugongs (though they leave the area from mid-May to Aug). The cruise departs from Monkey Mia Dolphin Resort at 1pm daily and costs A$59 (US$47). The *Shotover* also runs a 2-hour dolphin cruise every morning—worth doing even if you've already seen the dolphins on the shore. It costs A$54 (US$43) per person.

On your way in or out of Monkey Mia, stop by the **Hamelin Pool Historic Telegraph Station** (✆ **08/9942 5905**), 41km (26 miles) from the highway turnoff. A small museum houses old equipment, farming tools, and historical odds and sods from the 19th-century days when Monkey Mia was a repeater station on a telegraph line. The A$5.50 (US$4.40) admission fee to the museum includes an explanation of the **stromatolites,** rocky formations about a foot high that were created by the planet's first oxygen-breathing cells—in other words, Earth's first life. You might want to skip the museum, but do wander down to **Shell Beach** and have a look. The "sand" on the beach consists of millions of tiny white shells, which were quarried as bricks to build some of the local buildings. There is a cafe and gift store here, too.

You can explore the saltpans, dunes, coastal cliffs, short walking trails, and old homestead in the nearby 52,500-hectare (129,675-acre) **Francois Peron National Park,** either alone (you will need a four-wheel-drive) or on a half- or full-day tour—although not everyone will appreciate the park's harsh scenery. You should spot wallabies, birds, and emus, and you may see turtles, dolphins, rays, dugongs, and, in season, whales from the cliffs. Other activities include half- and full-day game and deep-sea-fishing trips from Denham, scuba diving, excursions to the deserted beaches and 180m (590-ft.) cliffs of nearby Dirk Hartog Island, and a couple of pearl-farm tours.

## THE NORTHWEST CAPE

1,272km (795 miles) N of Perth; 1,567km (979 miles) S of Broome

Driving along the only road on the **Northwest Cape** is like driving through a surrealistic dream. Hundreds of tall red anthills march to the horizon, sheep and 'roos threaten to get under the wheels, and the sun beats down from a harsh sky. On the Cape's western shore is **Coral Bay,** a tiny cluster of dive shops, backpacker lodges, a low-key resort, and charter boats nestled on sand so white, water so blue, and ocher

dust so orange you think the townsfolk computer-enhanced it. Stretching north of town are deserted sandy beaches edged by coral. On the Cape's east coast is **Exmouth** (pop. 3,500), born in 1967 as a support town to the nearby Harold E. Holt Naval Communications Station, a joint Australian–United States center. Whale-shark diving, scuba diving, and snorkeling in Ningaloo Marine Park are the big activities, along with 4WD trips over the arid Cape Range National Park and surrounding sheep stations.

Exmouth and Coral Bay are 150km (94 miles) apart. Coral Bay is several degrees cooler than Exmouth and has divine diving, swimming, and snorkeling; a restaurant and takeout or two; a bar; a small supermarket; and little else. Exmouth is hot, dusty, and charmless, but has more facilities than Coral Bay, including a supermarket, an **ATM,** and an outdoor cinema. Most tours not having to do with the reef, such as 4WD safaris, leave from Exmouth. Both places have plenty of dive and snorkel companies. Wherever you stay, book ahead in whale-shark season (Mar to early June).

## ESSENTIALS

**GETTING THERE** **Skywest** (✆ **1300/660 088** in Australia; www.skywest.com.au) flies from Perth daily. A shuttle bus meets every flight and takes you to your Exmouth hotel for A$18 (US$14) one-way. It does not accept reservations. (Have the cash on you; there's no ATM at the airport.) **Coral Bay Adventures** (✆ **08/9942 5955**) makes transfers, on demand, from the airport to Coral Bay, approximately 120km (74 miles) away, for A$55 (US$44) adults, A$35 (US$28) children under 13, one-way.

**Greyhound Australia** (✆ **13 14 99** in Australia, or 07/4690 9950) operates three times a week from Perth (trip time: 19 hr.) to Exmouth and Coral Bay. The fare is A$187 (US$150). Another option, which takes about the same time and costs the same, is Greyhound's daily Perth-Broome service, which connects with a service to Exmouth at the turnoff on the highway at Giralia in the wee hours of the morning. There is no train service.

The 14-hour drive from Perth (plus rest stops) is through lonely country on a two-lane highway. Check that your contract allows you to drive your rental car this far north and includes unlimited mileage. Wildlife will be thick on the ground, and gas stations thin. From Perth, take the Brand Highway north to Geraldton, 424km (263 miles) away, then the North West Coastal Highway for 623km (386 miles) to Minilya gas station; the Exmouth turnoff is 7km (4⅓ miles) north of Minilya. Exmouth is a farther 225km (140 miles) along the cape from the turnoff. Overnight at the **Mercure Inn Geraldton,** Brand Highway, Geraldton, WA 6530 (✆ **08/9921 2455;** A$140/US$112 double), or in Carnarvon, the only town between Geraldton and Exmouth. Everything else that looks like a town on your map is just a gas station. But keep in mind that even the gas stations can be 200km (130 miles) apart.

**VISITOR INFORMATION** The **Exmouth Visitor Centre,** Murat Road, Exmouth, WA 6707 (✆ **1800/287 328** in Western Australia, or 08/9949 1176; www.exmouth-australia.com), is open April to October daily from 8:30am to 5pm, or November through March from 10am to 3pm on weekends only. The **Milyering Visitors Centre,** 52km (32 miles) northwest of Exmouth, is the Cape Range National Park's information center, run by the state's Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM). It is open daily from 10am to 4pm but closes for lunch from 12:30 to 1:15pm. You can pick up a hiking-trail map of the park from CALM's office in Nimitz Street, Exmouth. **Coral Bay Adventures** runs a tour information and booking center in Robinson Street, Coral Bay, WA 6701 (✆ **08/9942 5955;** www.users.bigpond.com/coralbay).

The admission fee to the Cape Range National Park, payable at the Milyering Visitor Centre, is A$9 (US$7.20) per vehicle.

***Note:*** There is only one ATM on the Cape, in Exmouth.

**GETTING AROUND** Tours and dive operators pick up from either Exmouth or Coral Bay accommodations, but not usually from both. The roads to Exmouth and Coral Bay are paved, and so is the only road around the Cape's coast. **Avis** (✆ **08/9949 2942**), **Budget** (✆ **08/9949 1534**), and local operator **Allens Car Hire** (✆ **08/9949 2403**) have offices in Exmouth; there is no car rental in Coral Bay.

**Ningaloo Reef Bus** (✆ **08/9949 1776**) runs from Exmouth hotels to various beaches around the cape, stopping at the Milyering Visitors Centre en route. It runs April through October Monday, Tuesday, Friday, and Saturday, and daily November through March. The round-trip fare to the snorkel beauty spot of Turquoise Bay is A$20 (US$16) adults, A$10 (US$8) children, and A$55 (US$44) families. You can even hire a snorkel (but not fins) on the bus for A$5 (US$4).

## WHERE TO STAY & DINE

### In Exmouth

**Potshot Hotel Resort** The grounds are hot and dusty, but the building is in a modern complex. The brick motel rooms are cool and spacious; the homestead rooms are smaller, older, and more basic (they don't have phones). There are two-bedroom apartments, and across the road are newer three-bedroom apartments, some with Jacuzzis. The cocktail bar around the pool is the only shady place in town to enjoy a drink, which explains its popularity with locals. The restaurant is scant on atmosphere but has a long menu, good food, and a nice wine list. Prices are between A$15 and A$30 (US$12–US$24). There's a seafood buffet on Friday and Saturday nights.

Murat Rd., Exmouth, WA 6707. ✆ **08/9949 1200.** Fax 08/9949 1486. www.potshotresort.com. 97 units (all with shower only). A$90 (US$72) double homestead room; A$124–A$135 (US$99–US$108) resort studio room for up to 4; A$160 (US$128) 1-bed King spa room; A$145–A$240 (US$116–US$192) 2-bedroom apt; A$205–A$290 (US$164–US$232) 3-bedroom apt. Extra person A$12 (US$9.60). Maid service in apt A$22–A$33 (US$18–US$26) per day. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 3 restaurants; 4 bars; 3 small outdoor pools; coin-op laundry. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

### In Coral Bay

**Ningaloo Reef Resort** This low-rise complex of motel rooms, studios, and apartments stands out as the best place to stay among Coral Bay's profusion of backpacker hostels. Located on a blissfully green lawn with a swimming pool overlooking the bay, the rooms are nothing fancy or new, but they're clean, with views toward the bay and the pool. Some have kitchens. The place has a nice communal air, thanks to the bar doubling as the local pub.

At the end of Robinson St., Coral Bay, WA 6701. ✆ **08/9942 5934.** Fax 08/9942 5953. www.ningalooreefresort.com.au. 34 units, all with bathroom (shower only). A$143–A$148 (US$114–US$118) double; A$180–A$290 (US$144–US$232) apt. Extra person A$11 (US$8.80). Weekly rates available. MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor pool; coin-op laundry. *In room:* A/C, TV, kitchen (in some), hair dryer, iron, no phone.

## DIVING WITH WHALE SHARKS

"Diving" is not really a correct term for this activity because it's by snorkeling that you get close to these leviathans. Whale sharks are sharks, not whales, and they are the world's biggest fish, reaching 12 to 18m (39–59 ft.) in length. Terrified? Don't be. Their gigantic size belies a gentle nature and slow swimming speed, and despite having a mouth big enough to swallow a boatload of snorkelers, they eat only plankton

(which cannot possibly be confused with humans). Several boat operators take people out to swim alongside the fish when they appear late March through mid-June. A trip with **Exmouth Diving Centre** (✆ **1800/655 156** in Australia, or 08/9949 1201; www.exmouthdiving.com.au) or its Coral Bay sister company, **Ningaloo Reef Dive** (✆ **08/9942 5824;** www.ningalooreefdive.com) costs A$320 (US$256) for snorkeling or A$360 (US$288) including a scuba dive, with all gear included. Shark protection regulations limit your boat to 10 snorkelers and a maximum 90 minutes with any one fish, but your boat is free to search for several fish in 1 day. Most boats stop at reefs for more snorkeling, and some incorporate optional scuba dives.

### DIVING, SNORKELING, FISHING & FOUR-WHEEL-DRIVING

**Scuba dive** ★ the Cape's unspoiled waters and you will see marvelous reef formations, grouper, manta rays, octopus, morays, potato cod (which you can hand-feed), and other marvels at a dozen or more sites. Divers often spot humpback and false killer whales and large sharks, while snorkelers may see dolphins, dugongs, and turtles. Loads of dive companies in Exmouth and Coral Bay (including the two listed in "Diving with Whale Sharks," above) rent gear and run daily dive trips and learn-to-dive courses. A two-dive day trip costs A$170 (US$136) with all gear supplied. Three great snorkeling spots are the area right off the shore at Coral Bay; Bundegi Beach, 14km (nearly 9 miles) north of Exmouth; and **Turquoise Bay** ★, a 60km (37-mile) drive from Exmouth. In deeper waters off Coral Bay, you can snorkel with **manta rays** ★ with a "wingspan" of up to 7m (23 ft.). Companies in both towns run manta and reef-snorkel trips, and rent snorkel gear. The Cape has loads of swimming beaches; for safety's sake, never swim alone.

Reef fish, tuna, and Spanish mackerel are common catches in these waters, and black, blue, and striped marlin run outside the reef September through January. Up to a dozen boats operate reef and **game-fishing day trips** ★ out of Exmouth and Coral Bay, and tackle and tin fishing dinghies are easy to rent in either town.

Green and loggerhead **turtles** ★ lay eggs at night from November through February or March on the Cape's beaches. Take a flashlight and go looking for them, or join one of several turtle-watch tours from either town. August through October, boats run cruises from either town to spot **humpback whales.**

Because the Cape has few roads and even fewer sights along the way, take an off-road 240km (149-mile) four-wheel-drive escapade with **Neil McLeod's Ningaloo Safari Tours** ★ (✆ **08/9949 1550;** www.ningaloosafari.com). You will explore the arid limestone ridges of 50,581-hectare (124,935-acre) Cape Range National Park, snorkel Turquoise Bay, climb a lighthouse, and cruise orange-walled Yardie Creek Gorge to spot rock wallabies—snacking on Neil's mum's fruitcake along the way. This full-day trip departs your Exmouth hotel at 7:30am and returns at 6pm. It costs A$155 (US$124) for adults and A$115 (US$92) for children under 13. A 5-hour afternoon tour costs A$65 (US$52) adults and A$50 (US$40) children under 13. In turtle breeding season (Nov–Mar), Neil runs evening tours for A$45 (US$36) adults and A$35 (US$28) children under 13.

## 6 The Kimberley: A Far-Flung Wilderness

Most Aussies would be hard put to name a single settlement, river, or mountain within the Kimberley, so rarely visited and sparsely inhabited is this wilderness. This is an ancient land of red, rocky plateaus stretching for thousands of kilometers, jungly

# The Kimberley Region

ravines, endless bush, crocodile-infested wetlands, surreal-looking boab trees with trunks shaped like bottles, lily-filled rock pools, island-strewn coastline, droughts in winter, and floods in summer. The dry, spreading scenery might call to mind Africa or India. In the Dry, the area's biggest river, the Fitzroy, is empty, but in the Wet, its swollen banks are second only to the Amazon in the volume of water that surges to the sea. Aqua and scarlet are two colors that will hit you in the eye in the Kimberley—a luminous aqua for the sea, and the fiery scarlet of the soil hereabouts called *pindan.* The area is famous for Wandjina-style Aboriginal rock art depicting people with circular hair-dos that look more than a little like beings from outer space. It is also known for another kind of rock art known as "Bradshaw figures," sticklike representations of human forms, which may be the oldest on earth. A mere 25,000 people live in the Kimberley's 420,000 sq. km (162,000sq. miles).

The unofficial capital of the East Kimberley is **Kununurra.** It's a small agricultural town that serves as the gateway to wildlife river cruises; the **Bungle Bungles** ★, a massive labyrinth of beehive-shaped rock formations; and to a 400,000-hectare (988,000-acre) cattle station where you can hike, fish, and cruise palm-filled gorges by day and sleep in comfy permanent safari tents or glamorous homestead rooms by night. The main town in the West Kimberley is the Outback port of **Broome** ★ whose waters give up the world's biggest and best South Sea pearls. Linking Kununurra and Derby, near Broome, is the Gibb River Road, an isolated 4WD track through cattle-station country that is becoming popular with adventure travelers.

Off the West Kimberley coast lies a jigsaw puzzle of 10,000 or more barely inhabited islands, the **Bonaparte** ★ and **Buccaneer Archipelagos** ★, the last named in honor of the pirate's pirate, William Dampier, who sailed here in 1688. In fact, much of the appeal of this coastline lies in the knowledge that few Westerners have laid eyes on it since the first explorers of the 17th century.

## EXPLORING THE KIMBERLEY

**VISITOR INFORMATION** The **Kimberley Tourism Association,** P.O. Box 554, Broome, WA 6725 (✆ **08/9193 6660;** www.kimberleytourism.com), supplies information on the region. The **Kununurra Visitor Centre** and the **Broome Visitor Centre** (which appear later in this chapter) handle inquiries about things to see and do across the Kimberley, and you can drop into their information offices once you arrive.

**GETTING AROUND** Enormous distances, high gasoline costs (often A$1 per liter or more, equivalent to US$3.20 per gallon), Wet season floods, and very limited roads and facilities can make traveling the Kimberley expensive and time-consuming. The place has lots of attractions so remote they can only be reached by aerial tours or charter boats. Many more are accessible only by unpaved roads, for which your two-wheel-drive rental car is not insured and which it probably can't handle. If you don't want to rely on tours, rent a four-wheel-drive (available in Broome and Kununurra). Allow for an average speed of 60kmph (37 mph) on the area's unsealed roads and never exceed 80kmph (50 mph) because unexpected dips and smooth patches can take you by surprise. Most outfits will allow one-way rentals between Broome and Kununurra, or vice versa, at a surcharge of about A$350 to A$550 (US$280–US$440). Review "Road Conditions & Safety," "What If Your Vehicle Breaks Down?," and "Tips for Four-Wheel Drivers," in the "Getting Around Australia" section of chapter 2 before setting off. **Kimberley Camping & Outback Supplies,** 65 Frederick St., Broome (✆ **08/9193 5909**), sells and rents every piece of camping equipment you need, from tents and "mozzie" (mosquito) nets to cooking utensils, plus outdoor clothing.

### Bushwalking with Camels

In the cooler Dry season, bushwalking in this unspoiled environment is delightful. **Kimberley Bushwalks** (✆ **08/9191 7017;** www.bushwalks.com) has hit on the neat idea of using camels to carry your gear (or you can ride them). It visits places inaccessible by car or boat from Broome, such as forested parts of the Fitzroy River, into the Great Sandy Desert sand-hills, through ancient springs and billabongs, and to the Ngyginah Aboriginal people in the purple Mt. Anderson ranges. Safaris operate on request. Costs are A$220 (US$176) per adult per day, A$180 (US$144) for kids under 12, for a minimum group of 4 people and maximum of 12.

Taking a guided four-wheel-drive camping or accommodated safari is a neat way to sidestep the challenges of Kimberley travel. Safaris depart Broome, Kununurra, or Darwin, and last between 2 days and 2 weeks. A popular route is the cross-Kimberley journey between Broome and Kununurra. If you opt for this route, look for tours that traverse the Gibb River Road, rather than the scenically dull highway via Halls Creek and Fitzroy Crossing. The Gibb River Road is an unpaved "back road" between Kununurra and Broome that offers access to gorges, low red ranges, swimming holes (ask directions to croc-free ones), walking trails, barramundi fishing, and campsites or basic homestead accommodations on cattle stations (ranches). Most safaris run only in the Dry season, April or May through October or November. Respected operators include **East Kimberley Tours** (✆ **08/9168 2213;** www.eastkimberleytours.com.au); **APT Kimberley Wilderness Adventures** (✆ **1800/675 222** in Australia, or 03/9277 8444; www.kimberleywilderness.com.au); **Adventure Tours** (✆ **1300/654 604** in Australia, or 08/8309 2277; www.adventuretours.com.au); and **Australian Pinnacle Tours** (✆ **1800/999 069** in Australia, or 08/9417 5555; www.pinnacletours.com.au).

**Broome Aviation** (✆ **1300/136 629** in Australia, or 08/9192 1369; www.broomeaviation.com) and **King Leopold Air** (✆ **08/9193 7155;** www.kingleopoldair.com.au), both based in Broome, and **Alligator Airways** (✆ **1800/632 533** in Australia, or 08/9168 1333; www.alligatorairways.com.au) and **Slingair Heliwork** (✆ **1800/095 500** in Australia, or 08/9169 1300; www.slingair.com.au), both based in Kununurra, run a range of flight-seeing tours all over the Kimberley, lasting from a couple of hours to several days. Some involve sightseeing on the ground, hiking, four-wheel-drive trips, overnights at fishing camps, or stops at cattle stations.

## KUNUNURRA

827km (517 miles) SW of Darwin; 1,032km (645 miles) E of Broome

Given the arid conditions in the Kimberley, it's quite a surprise to swoop over a field of sugar cane as you come in to land at Kununurra. This little town (pop. 5,000) is an agricultural center created by the damming of the Ord River to form Lake Argyle.

Kununurra itself (the name is Aboriginal for "Meeting of Big Waters") has little to spark your interest, but it is the gateway to several outstanding attractions. A cruise down the Ord River to see wild birds, dramatic cliffs, and crocs is a must. So is a flight over or a hike into the Bungle Bungles (Purnululu National Park), monumental orange domes of rock that look like giant beehives. The world's biggest diamond mine is not in South Africa but out in the rugged Kimberley wilds near Kununurra, and can

be visited by air every day. The town is also a gateway to El Questro, a 400,000-hectare (988,000-acre) cattle station where you can hike magnificent gorges, fish, cruise rivers, ride horses, and see some of Australia's most breathtaking Aboriginal art. It is open from April to early November, closed over summer due to the Wet season.

## ESSENTIALS

**GETTING THERE** **Air North** (✆ **1800/627 474** in Australia, or 08/8920 4001; www.airnorth.com.au) flies from Broome and Darwin daily. There is no train to Kununurra. **Greyhound Australia** (✆ **13 14 99** in Australia, or 07/4690 9950) serves the town daily from Perth via Broome and from Darwin via Katherine. From Perth the trip takes about 49 hours, from Broome about 15 hours. The one-way fare from Perth is A$494 (US$395). From Darwin, trip time is around 10 hours, and the fare is A$161 (US$129).

Kununurra is 512km (320 miles) west of Katherine on the Victoria Highway. The Great Northern Highway from Broome connects with the Victoria Highway 45km (28 miles) west of Kununurra. The Gibb River Road is an alternate 4WD scenic route from Derby near Broome (see "Driving the Gibb River Road," below); it connects with the Great Northern Highway 53km (33 miles) west of town.

**VISITOR INFORMATION** The **Kununurra Visitor Centre** is at Coolibah Drive, Kununurra, WA 6743 (✆ **08/9168 1177;** www.eastkimberley.com.au). Hours change with the season, but it's usually open April to September daily from 9am to 5pm, and between October and March weekdays from 9am to 5pm and Saturday 9am to noon (closed Sun and public holidays during this time).

**GETTING AROUND** **Avis** (✆ 08/9169 1258), **Budget** (✆ 08/9168 2033), **Europcar** (✆ 08/91682133), **Hertz** (✆ 08/9169 1424), and **Thrifty** (✆ 08/9169 1911) all rent four-wheel-drive vehicles. Hertz also rents camping gear.

## WHERE TO STAY

Apart from the prohibitively expensive upscale homestead, there are other accommodations options at the station, as described below.

Four-wheel-drive transfers for guests operate from Kununurra; a ranger drives and gives a commentary en route. The cost is A$150 (US$120) per adult round-trip to Emma Gorge, or A$180 (US$144) to Station Township; children under 12 are half-price. If you are driving yourself, take the Great Northern Highway 58km (36 miles) from Kununurra toward Wyndham, then the (unsealed) Gibb River Road 25km (16 miles) to Emma Gorge Resort (which is 2km/1¼ miles along an access road), or a farther 27km (17 miles) to the station store.

### Country Club Hotel

Just down the road from the visitor center, this low-rise hotel is your best bet among Kununurra's modest choice of accommodations. Set in tropical gardens, it has a lovely shaded pool with sun lounges and a bar, and a couple of simple dining and bar venues. The rooms are nothing flashy, but they're neat and clean, with plenty of space. The front desk lends hair dryers.

47 Coolibah Dr., Kununurra, WA 6743. ✆ **1800/808 999** in Australia, or 08/9168 1024. Fax 08/9168 1189. www.countryclubhotel.com.au. 88 units (80 with shower only). Dry season (Apr–Oct) A$168 (US$134) double, A$222 (US$178) 2-bedroom apt; Wet season (Nov–Mar) A$148 (US$118) double, A$191 (US$153) 2-bedroom apt. Extra person A$24 (US$19). AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; 3 bars; outdoor pool; tour desk; coin-op laundry. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge.

### Emma Gorge Resort ★★

Ten new "tented cabins" were added in 2005 to the neatly kept oasis of permanent tents on lush lawns under pandanus palms at the foot

of the red Cockburn Range at Emma Gorge Resort. This is a great way to experience the wilderness without sacrificing comfort. The "tents" are very comfortable, with polished wooden floors, electric lights, fans, insect screens, nice firm beds with goose-feather pillows, Indian cotton sheets and quilts, and flashlights for getting around at night. Those without bathrooms share clean and modern facilities. The reception desk stocks items like sunscreen and souvenirs, and lends hair dryers. The rustic restaurant serves gourmet bush-tucker meals that would put many big-city restaurants to shame and has a retractable roof for stargazing. There is also a new viewing platform for the best views of the spectacular Saddleback Ridge, overlooking El Questro Valley. Free to guests is access to a 1.6km (1-mile) trail along lush Emma Gorge to the natural swimming hole and trickling waterfall enclosed by 46m (150-ft.) cliffs. Emma Gorge is 85km (53 miles), an hour's drive, from Kununurra. Station Township is 27km (17 miles) away.

Gibb River Rd. (P.O. Box 909), Kununurra, WA 6743. (✆ **1300/656 565** in Australia, or 08/9169 1777. Fax 08/9169 1383. www.elquestro.com.au. 55 tented cabins, 37 with bathroom (shower only). A$135–A$185 (US$108–US$148) double; A$220 (US$176) deluxe tented cabins for up to 4. Transfers A$55 (US$44) per person each way; children under 12 half-price. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; outdoor pool; tour desk; coin-op laundry. *In room:* No phone.

**Station Township Bungalows** These basic but comfortable bungalow-style rooms in the heart of Station Township are good for anyone without their own transportation—tours depart from right outside. The nicest units are the eight newish ones with balconies overhanging the Pentecost River. Two of the four original stone bungalows sleep six but rent for the same price. The front desk lends hair dryers. The **Steakhouse** restaurant and bar serves three meals a day of the steak and barramundi kind, and there is often live music and Outback entertainment at the Swinging Arm Bar. A swimming hole is nearby. The bungalows are 110km (68 miles), about 90 minutes, from Kununurra.

Gibb River Rd. (P.O. Box 909), Kununurra, WA 6743. ✆ **08/9169 1777.** Fax 08/9169 1383. www.elquestro.com.au. 12 bungalows (with shower only). A$270 (US$216) bungalow for up to 4. Transfers A$70 (US$56). AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; tour desk; 4-wheel-drive rental desk; coin-op laundry. *In room:* A/C, fridge, coffeemaker; no phone.

**Station Township Riverside Camping** In addition to the other El Questro options, there are two camping areas. **Black Cockatoo Riverside Camping** has 45 campsites near the station store, and 28 more secluded riverside campsites lie within a 6km (3¾-mile) drive. Campers share shower facilities and a laundry, and use the bungalows' restaurant. No reservations are taken for campsites. ***Note:*** The Wilderness Park Permit fee is not included in the campground fee.

Gibb River Rd. (P.O. Box 909), Kununurra, WA 6743. ✆ **08/9169 1777.** Fax 08/9169 1383. www.elquestro.com.au. A$15 (US$12) per person. Children under 12 stay free. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; coin-op laundry.

## WHAT TO SEE & DO

**ON THE ORD RIVER** Cruise outfits offer trips on the Ord River or Lake Argyle, a man-made blue inland sea ringed by red cliffs and bigger than 19 Sydney Harbours. Go for the Ord. The Ord River is one of the most picturesque waterways in Australia, lined by red cliffs in parts, and teeming with all kinds of wetland birds and freshwater crocodiles. Jeff Haley of **Triple J. Tours** ★ (✆ **08/9168 2682;** www.triplejtours.net.au) runs excellent cruises. The company has three boats and several itineraries, which vary from Dry season to Wet. The most popular starts with a 70km (43-mile) narrated coach ride to Lake Argyle, continues with a wander through a historic homestead, and ends with a 55km (34-mile) cruise down the Ord back to Kununurra. The boat travels fast, and Jeff pulls in at numerous tranquil spots. This costs A$110

(US$88) for adults and A$70 (US$56) for children 4 to 15, including pickup from your hotel for an 11:30am start and afternoon tea. You get back by around sunset.

**Big Waters Kimberley Canoe Safaris** (✆ **1800/641 998** in Australia, or 08/9169 1998; www.adventure.kimberley.net.au) offers a popular 3-day self-guided canoeing and camping safari down the Class I (that means "gentle") Ord River in two-person Canadian canoes. It costs A$145 (US$116) per person. During the Wet you can do a 1-day tour for A$45 (US$36) per person.

A day on the river to fish for barramundi with Greg Harman's **Ultimate Adventures** (✆ **08/9168 2310;** www.wn.com.au/ultimateadvent) costs around A$250 (US$200) per person, more if there is only one of you. Greg also offers trips of up to 10 days to remote fishing camps.

**DIAMONDS IN THE ROUGH** Turning out an impressive 38 million carats a year—that's more than 8 tons of pure diamond—is the world's biggest diamond mine, the **Argyle Diamond Mine,** 176km (109 miles) from Kununurra. It is the only mine in the world that produces pink diamonds in commercial quantities; champagne, cognac, yellow, green, and white rocks also come from this mine. During a 3½- to 4-hour visit, you will see rough and polished gems in the viewing room, watch gems get extracted from the open-cut mine (as long as safety conditions permit), and, if you like, buy diamonds. For security reasons, you must join an aerial tour with **Belray Diamond Mine Tours** (✆ **08/9168 1014**), which you can also book through **Alligator Airways** (✆ **08/9168 1333;** www.alligatorairways.com.au). Opt for a flight that covers the nearby Purnululu (Bungle Bungles) National Park and Lake Argyle as well; this option costs A$385 (US$308) per person. Belray Diamond Tours runs a coach trip Thursdays only, June through September. It costs A$245 (US$196) per person, and it's a 2½-hour drive each way. Kids under 12 are not permitted on mine tours.

**SPENDING THE DAY AT EL QUESTRO WILDERNESS PARK** ★★ You do not have to stay in El Questro (see "Where to Stay," above) to enjoy the facilities. When Englishman Will Burrell bought this 400,000-hectare (988,000-acre) cattle station (ranch) in 1991, he turned it into a kind of Outback holiday camp where anyone from international celebrities to humble 4WD enthusiasts could revel in its rugged beauty. Although it's a working farm, guests don't get involved in that side of things. Instead, they go barramundi fishing and heli-fishing in croc-infested wetlands and rivers, soak under palm trees in the thermal waters of Zebedee Springs (closed from noon daily), hike gorges, some of which hide pockets of rainforest, take half-day 4WD fishing safaris, cruise tranquil Chamberlain Gorge, horseback ride across stony plains, photograph red rocky ranges, join rangers on bird-watching or "bush-tucker" tours, or explore a rich lode of Aboriginal rock paintings. It's an unspoiled, primeval place.

El Questro is open from late March to early November (it closes in the Wet, Nov–Mar). It is 100km (62 miles) west of Kununurra by road (58km/36 miles on the sealed Great Northern Hwy. toward Wyndham, then the graded gravel Gibb River Rd.). To enter, visitors must purchase a 7-day **Wilderness Park Permit,** which costs A$15 (US$12) per person; children under 12 enter free. Buy permits from El Questro's Kununurra office, in Tourism House on Coolibah Drive, where the staff will give you a map and point out all there is to see and do, or at Station Township. The Township is a settlement where El Questro's main facilities (bungalows, restaurant, airstrip, camping areas, stables, and so forth) are. It acts as a kind of headquarters—most tours and activities depart here, and it's where you can buy supplies and fuel, and rent four-wheel-drives and camping gear. Consider renting a four-wheel-drive in Kununurra or

at Station Township. Transfers from the Homestead and Emma Gorge, both within the wilderness park, cost A$60 (US$48) per person to join tours and activities departing Station Township, so while it is not crucial to have your own four-wheel-drive, it is less costly. Having your own vehicle also means you can explore independently. El Questro Reservations rents them for A$130 to A$176 (US$104–US$141) per day, plus around A30¢ (US25¢) per kilometer after the first 100km (62 miles). It's best to book them ahead because the fleet size is limited.

The station runs 12-hour ranger-guided day trips from Kununurra which include the highlights of a Chamberlain Gorge cruise to see Aboriginal Wandjina rock art and soak in Zebedee Springs, plus a gorge walk, lunch at the Station Township restaurant, and 4WD transfers, for A$165 (US$132) per person. Ask staff to identify which swimming spots are croc-free, and don't swim anywhere else!

You pay for most activities—from A$65 (US$52) for a 2-hour horse ride to A$595 (US$476) for a half-day's saltwater heli-fishing. Typical prices are A$44 (US$35) for a gorge cruise, A$75 (US$60) for a 4-hour four-wheel-drive trip to watch the sun set over the Cockburn Range, or A$185 (US$148) for a half-day barramundi-fishing trip.

## PURNULULU (BUNGLE BUNGLES) NATIONAL PARK

Rising out of the landscape 250km (156 miles) south of Kununurra are thousands of enormous sandstone domes 200 to 300m (656–984 ft.) high called the **Bungle Bungles** ★★★. Thought to be named either after "bundle bundle" grass or the bungle beetle, the Bungle Bungles get their distinctive orange and gray stripes from algae found in the permeable layers and mineral graining in nonpermeable layers. The formations are 360 million years old.

The domes look spectacular from the air—and that's the only way to see them in the Wet, as the park is closed to ground traffic January through March. As the waters subside (sometimes not until early June, and they may swell again in late Oct), the soaring gorges and forested creeks at the base of the Bungle Bungles are accessible on foot. Highlights are the beehive-shaped walls of **Cathedral Gorge,** the rock pool at **Frog Hole Gorge,** and palm-filled **Echidna Chasm.** Keep an eye peeled for rainbow bee-eaters; flocks of budgerigars; rare nailtail wallabies; and euros, a kind of kangaroo.

There are two campgrounds with pit toilets, wood barbecues, and water (boil before drinking) but no showers and no telephones. The camping fee is A$9 (US$7.20) for adults, A$2 (US$1.60) for kids under 16. Bring food and fuel with you. For information call the state **Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM)** (✆ **08/9168 4200**) in Kununurra; there's a visitor center/ranger station (✆ **08/9168 7300**) in the park.

**GETTING THERE & GETTING AROUND** Most folks take a scenic flight over the park in a light aircraft from Kununurra with **Slingair Heliwork** (✆ **1800/095 500** in Australia, or 08/9169 1300) or **Alligator Airways** (✆ **1800/632 533** in Australia, or 08/9168 1333). The flight takes about 2 hours, incorporates a flight over Lake Argyle and the impressive Argyle Diamond Mine, and costs A$220 (US$176) for adults and A$140 (US$112) for children 3 to 12. Both companies also do day trips that combine the flight with hiking, though the trips are pricey, starting at A$485 (US$388) for adults and A$390 (US$312) for kids. **East Kimberley Tours** (✆ **08/9168 2213;** www.eastkimberleytours.com.au) runs an array of four-wheel-drive and fly-drive camping and hiking safaris into the park, including some 1-day "express" versions.

Road access is 4WD only. To explore by car, you will need at least 1 night to explore Purnululu's 3,000 sq. km (1,158 sq. miles); admission is A$9 (US$7.20) per vehicle. Take the Victoria Highway 45km (28 miles) west of Kununurra, turn left onto the Great Northern Highway for 201km (126 miles) to the park turnoff, and allow 2 hours to cover the final tough 53km (33 miles) from the highway to the park entrance. Turkey Creek, 53km (33 miles) north of the turnoff, is the nearest place for supplies.

## DRIVING THE GIBB RIVER ROAD

If you really want to discover the Outback, the Gibb River Road is for you. Traversing this sandy, rocky, unpaved 660km (413-mile) 4WD track that links the east and west Kimberley is fast becoming a must-do for seasoned adventure travelers. Populated only by stark red ranges, rivers that flood to the horizon in the Wet and vanish to dustbowls in the Dry, fern-fringed swimming holes and waterfalls, and huge cattle stations, it is a road for self-reliant folk who seek wilderness and know how to change a tire. Homesteads along the way offer activities such as barramundi fishing in lily-clad water holes, hikes through gorges, and aerial tours to remote Prince Regent Nature Reserve, King's Cascade, Mitchell Falls, the Horizontal Waterfalls, and other spots on the north Kimberley Coast. Some serve meals and have basic accommodations, ranging from campsites with hot showers to rooms at the homestead. You ain't in the lap of luxury, but after that road you'd hardly expect it. Getting there involves travel over ribbed corrugation on the gravel, soft patches, and bumpy rocks that will limit your speed to 60kmph (38 mph) or slower much of the way. It's possible to drive the road in 2 days or even 1, but give yourself 3 to 5 days to do some sightseeing. ***Note:*** You can count on the road being passable only from May to October; much of it is under water in the Wet.

The road starts on the Great Northern Highway, 53km (33 miles) west of Kununurra. **El Questro** (see "What to See & Do," in the Kununurra section, above) is the first stop, 33km (21 miles) along. It finishes in **Derby,** a small coastal town 221km (138 miles) northeast of Broome. The Great Northern Highway connects Derby with Broome. **Windjana Gorge** and **Tunnel Creek National Parks** (described below) are accessed off the road.

To drive the road in a rented 4WD, you will need written permission from your rental-car company. Carry cash (forget about ATMs out here, and traveler's checks are not always accepted), spare fuel, enough drinking water and food to last 3 or 4 days longer than you think you'll need, a tool kit, a tire puncture repair kit and a high lift jack, a spare tire, radiator hoses, a spare fan belt, and a first-aid kit. Your rental-car company should provide all of this, except your food and water. If you want to stay in rooms rather than in the campground, book ahead. Even so, carry camping gear in case tire punctures, swollen creeks, or some other circumstance holds you up between homesteads. Some homesteads are private farms not open to the public, and their owners take a dim view of poorly prepared tourists begging them for water, fuel, or food. Swim only where the locals tell you, on account of crocodiles.

Before setting off, obtain a copy of the A$4 (US$3.20) *Gibb River And Kalumburu Road Travellers Guide,* published by the Derby Tourist Bureau and updated every year, that lists accommodations, the very few fuel stops, and other facilities along the way. It is available from the tourist bureaus in Kununurra and Broome, or you can order it in advance from the bureau (✆ **08/9191 1426;** www.derbytourism.com.au).

Plenty of 4WD safari tours operate on the road between Broome and Kununurra, and even from Darwin, taking between 5 and 10 days. See "Exploring the Kimberley," earlier in this chapter, for companies to contact.

## TUNNEL CREEK & WINDJANA GORGE NATIONAL PARKS

**Windjana Gorge National Park** is 240km (150 miles) east of Broome, 21km (13 miles) off the Gibb River Road. The 350 million-year-old walls of the gorge, which shoot straight up as high as 100m (328 ft.) above the sandy desert floor, are an old limestone barrier reef. A picturesque 7km (4-mile) round-trip trail winds through the gorge, revealing fossilized marine creatures from the Devonian period. This reef is part of a much larger barrier reef—comprising hundreds of coral patches, some a couple of kilometers across, other hundreds of kilometers wide—created when this part of Australia was an ocean floor. As the ocean subsided, those coral-building creatures kept on building their reefs higher. When the ocean floor pushed up above sea level, the reefs were left high and dry and became the **Napier Ranges.** The **Lennard River,** which carved Windjana Gorge, flows only during the Wet, but freshwater crocodiles, fruit bats, and birds are common year-round in and around the residual pools.

Thirty kilometers (19 miles) southeast of Windjana Gorge is **Tunnel Creek National Park,** where you can explore a cave tunneled by the river through the ancient limestone reef system. To reach it, you wade through the creek for 750m (about half a mile) in the dark. Before you leave Broome, ask your hotel to lend you a torch (flashlight) to reveal the tunnel's stalactites, fish, five bat species including rare ghost bats, and even the odd freshwater croc (the "friendly" sort). Wear shoes you can get wet, and expect the water to be cold!

**GETTING THERE & GETTING AROUND** You can include Windjana and Tunnel Creek on a Gibb River Road safari or visit from Broome. Take the Great Northern Highway east for 187km (117 miles), take a left onto the Derby Highway for 43km (27 miles) to Derby, and then head east along the Gibb River Road. ***Note:*** The last 70km (44 miles) to Windjana, and from there to Tunnel Creek, is unpaved, so you will need a 4WD. Both parks are usually closed in the Wet from November or December to mid-April.

Camping at Windjana Gorge costs A$9 (US$7.20) for adults, A$2 (US$1.60) for kids under 16. The campground has cold showers, toilets, barbecues and wood, and a public telephone, but no food or fuel. There is no camping, food, water, or ranger station in Tunnel Creek National Park. Neither park has an admission fee. Coach and 4WD day tours run from Broome.

For park information and to check accessibility and road conditions outside May to September, call the state **Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM)** in Broome (✆ **08/9192 1036**).

## GEIKIE GORGE NATIONAL PARK

Freshwater versions of saltwater beasties such as sharks, sawfish, and stingrays lurk in the Fitzroy River, which flows through Geikie Gorge (pronounced *Geekie*). Although strictly speaking, the gorge is part of an ancient Devonian reef, like Windjana Gorge and Tunnel Creek, its gold and gray 30m (98-ft.) walls were built not by coral but by algae. Like Windjana Gorge, its walls show primitive life forms that inhabited a time before reptiles and mammals were around. Today, pandanus palms, wild passion fruit, mangroves, and river gums line the banks, and freshwater crocodiles and all kinds of birds can be seen, especially in the Dry. If you spot a stream of water arching out of the river, that's an archer fish targeting an insect by spitting at it. There are moves afoot to dam the mighty Fitzroy, which makes sense to some farmers but will wreak havoc on the ecology of fish and rare birds and flood Aboriginal cultural sites.

A great way to experience the park is on a **Darngku Heritage** boat tour (✆ **08/9191 5552,** or 0417/907 009 mobile) with local Aboriginal guides. The half-day cruises take up to 12 people into areas usually not accessible to the public. Tours include lunch and leave at 8:15am each day, returning at 1:30pm. There is also a 3-hour walk and cruise, and plans for a fishing tour. Park rangers also run 90-minute cruises up to three times a day, depending on demand. Ranger cruises cost A$18 (US$14) for adults and A$2 (US$1.60) for kids, and focus on the geology, wildlife, and history of the area. Check with the **ranger** (✆ **08/9191 5355**) for times. Advance bookings are not needed. There are also two walking trails to explore, a 1-hour round-trip "reef" trail along the base of the gorge wall and a 20-minute walk along the river bank to a fishing and swimming hole.

Cruises run April to October or November; the gorge is open but may be cut off by floods December to March. There are picnic facilities (buy food in Fitzroy Crossing) but no camping.

For other information, call the state **Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM)** in Fitzroy Crossing (✆ **08/9191 5121**) or in the Dry season at the gorge (✆ **08/9191 5112**).

**GETTING THERE & GETTING AROUND** Admission to the park is free. The gorge is 418km (261 miles) east of Broome, so be prepared for a long day. The road is paved all the way. Take care with the water level on the several concrete fords. The nearest town is **Fitzroy Crossing,** 18km (11 miles) before the entrance; contact the Fitzroy Crossing Tourist Bureau (✆ **08/9191 5355**). No rangers are based in the park during the Wet. Coach and 4WD day tours are available from Broome year-round.

## BROOME

2,250km (1,406 miles) N of Perth; 1,859km (1,161 miles) SW of Darwin

Part rough Outback town, part glam seaside resort, the pearling port of **Broome** ★ (pop. 11,000) is a hybrid of Australia and Asia you won't see anywhere else. Chinese and Japanese pearl divers used to work the pearling luggers in this isolated little town in the old days, and as the Chinese settled here, they affixed their distinctive architecture to typical Australian buildings. The result is a main street so cute it could be a movie set, with neat rows of Australian corrugated-iron stores wrapped by verandas and trimmed with Chinese peaked roofs.

The people are unique, too, because Anglo-Saxon/Irish Aussies and Chinese, Filipino, and Malaysian pearl workers often married Aboriginal women. The Japanese tended to return home, but not all of them made it as cyclones, the "bends," sharks, and crocodiles all took their toll—their legacy in the town is found in a divers' cemetery (see below).

For such a small and remote place, Broome is surprisingly sophisticated. Walk the streets of Chinatown and you will rub shoulders with Aussie tourists, itinerant workers, Asian food store proprietors, tough-as-nails cattle hands, and well-heeled visitors from Europe and America downing good coffee at the couple of trendy cafes. Broome's world-renowned South Sea pearls are still its bread and butter, but the old timber pearling luggers have been replaced with gleaming high-tech vessels equipped with helipads and stainless steel security doors.

To be honest, it's kind of hard to explain Broome's appeal. There is not much to do, but it's a nice place to be. You can shop for pearls, and it's a good base for exploring the Kimberley. But most people simply come to laze by the jade-green Indian Ocean

on Cable Beach, ride camels along the sand as the sun plops into the sea, fish the bountiful seas, mosey around the art galleries and jewelry stores, and soak up the gorgeous reds, blues, and greens of the Kimberley coast.

## ESSENTIALS

**GETTING THERE** **Qantas** flies direct from Sydney, Melbourne, and Perth. **Qantaslink** (✆ **13 13 13** in Australia, or 800/227-4500 in the U.S. and Canada) flies from Alice Springs. **Virgin Blue** (✆ **13 67 89** in Australia, or 07/3295 2296) flies direct to Broome from Perth and Adelaide, with connections from other cities. **Skywest** (✆ **1300/660 088** in Australia; www.skywest.com.au) flies from Perth daily.

**Greyhound Australia** (✆ **13 14 99** in Australia, or 07/4690 9950) has daily service from Perth. It takes around 34 hours. The fare is A$313 (US$250). Greyhound's daily service from Darwin via Katherine and Kununurra takes around 24 hours; the one-way fare is A$302 (US$242). There is no train service.

Broome is 34km (21 miles) off the Great Northern Highway, which leads from Perth in the south, Kununurra to the east. The Gibb River Road is an alternate 4WD scenic route from Kununurra (see "Driving the Gibb River Road," above).

**VISITOR INFORMATION** The **Broome Visitor Centre** is on the Great Northern Highway (locals call it the Broome Hwy.) at Bagot Street, Broome, WA 6725 (✆ **1800/883 777** in Australia, or 08/9192 2222; www.broomevisitorcentre.com.au). It's open Monday through Friday from 8am to 5pm. On Saturday, Sunday, and public holidays, it's open from 9am to 4pm in the Dry (Apr–Sept), and from 9am to 1pm in the Wet (Oct–Mar).

Book accommodations and tours well ahead in the peak June to August season.

**GETTING AROUND** **Avis** (✆ 08/9193 5980), **Broome Car Rentals** (✆ 1800/676 725 in Australia, or 08/9192 2210), **Budget** (✆ 08/9193 5355), **Europcar** (✆ 08/9193 7788), **Hertz** (✆ 08/9192 1428) and **Thrifty** (✆ 08/9192 2210) all rent conventional cars and 4WDs. Hertz also rents camping-gear kits and car-top tents that affix to the larger 4WDs. Among the motor-home companies are **Apollo Motorhome Holidays** (✆ 08/9192 3087) and **Britz** (✆ 1800/331 454 in Australia, or 08/9192 2647).

The **Pearl Town Bus Service** (✆ **08/9193 6585**) does an hourly loop of most attractions daily from 7:10am to 6:15pm. From May to October, it also runs every half-hour from 9am to 3pm. A single adult fare is A$2.70 (US$2.15), or A$6 (US$4.80) for families of four. A five-trip adult ticket is A$12 (US$9.60).

**Broome Taxis** (✆ **08/9192 1133**) operates the airport shuttle; book ahead if you want a transfer to your hotel door. The other cab company in town is **Roebuck Taxis** (✆ **1800/880 330**).

Several coach and 4WD companies run a variety of day tours of the town, plus trips of a day or several days to natural attractions farther afield, like Windjana and Geikie Gorges, Tunnel Creek, and the Dampier Peninsula.

**Broome Day Tours** (✆ **1800/801 068** in Australia, or 08/9192 1068) runs tours of the town and farther afield to gorges and other natural attractions. **Over the Top Adventure Tours** (✆ **08/9192 5211,** or 0427/943 291 mobile) runs 4WD tours of 1 to 5 days to hard-to-get-to wilderness spots like the Dampier Peninsula.

## WHERE TO STAY & DINE

As well as in-hotel dining, head over to the **Cable Beach Club Resort,** Cable Beach Road (✆ **08/9192 0400**) for Broome's greatest range of menus. There's **The Club**

**Restaurant** for elegant fine dining; the **Asian Affair,** which offers exotic cuisine beside the ocean pool; and the poolside **Kimberley BBQ.** The last two only open between April and October.

**The Kimberley Klub** *Value* This stylish Outback-style lodge within walking distance of town might be aimed at the backpacker market, but all budget travelers will like its clean private rooms furnished simply with a double or twin beds and two bunks. You can choose between private rooms with your own bathroom or cheaper ones that share the clean shower/toilet facilities, and you can rent towels for A$2 (US$1.60) for the duration of your stay. Some rooms have air-conditioning (and higher nightly rates), which is a bonus during the Wet season, but you are unlikely to need it in the Dry, thanks to some clever airflow work by the architects. The rooms are spartan (no TV, no tea and coffee, no fridge, no sink), but you will spend most of your time around the rock-lined pool and the large, rustic open-sided dining area. The crowd is friendly, so this is a great spot to socialize and meet other travelers. There's a TV lounge, Internet access, a small volleyball and badminton court, pool tables, table tennis, a book exchange/library, and a communal kitchen, and the staff organizes theme nights and other activities. You need to like loud music to stay here, but it's lights-out at 11pm, so everyone gets some sleep. Excellent value for the money.

62 Frederick St., Broome, WA 6725. ✆ **1800/004 345** in Australia, or 08/9192 3233. Fax 08/9192 3530. www.kimberleyklub.com. 50 quad-share dorm beds, 24 private units. A$90–A$150 (US$72–US$120) double; A$21–A$25 (US$17–US$20) quad share; A$21–A$23 (US$17–US$18) dorm bed. AE, DC, MC, V. Free pickup from Greyhound Australia terminal. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; tour desk; game room; bike rental; coin-op laundry. *In room:* A/C (in some).

**Mangrove Resort Hotel** The best views in Broome are across Roebuck Bay from this recently refurbished modest but appealing cliff-top hotel, a 5-minute walk from town. There's no faulting the well-kept, roomy deluxe rooms with sea views. Sixteen extra-large executive rooms were added in 2002, and there are also four suites with kitchenettes, separate bedrooms, and Jacuzzis. The swimming pools and Jacuzzis are set in the lawns overlooking the bay. It's worth hightailing it back from sightseeing just to watch dusk fall over the bay from **The Tides,** a lovely outdoor restaurant serving fresh, affordable food. The restaurant's tables and chairs sit out on the lawns under the palms and along the cliff edge. Inside, Charters restaurant is one of Broome's best. The town bus stops across the road.

47 Carnarvon St., Broome, WA 6725. ✆ **1800/094 818** in Australia, or 08/9192 1303. Fax 08/9193 5169. www.mangrovehotel.com.au. 70 units (66 with shower only). Apr–Sept A$170–A$205 (US$136–US$164) double; A$265–A$295 (US$212–US$236) suite. Oct–Mar A$145–A$178 (US$116–US$142) double; A$235–A$275 (US$188–US$220) suite. Extra person A$35 (US$28). Children under 3 stay free in parent's room. Ask about Wet-season packages. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; 2 bars; 2 outdoor pools; spa; 2 Jacuzzis; tour desk; courtesy car from airport; limited room service; coin-op laundry; laundry service; same-day dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV w/free movies, kitchenette (in suites), fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

## WHAT TO SEE & DO: PEARLS, CAMEL RIDES, OUTDOOR MOVIES & MORE

When you arrive, head to **Chinatown,** in the town center on Carnarvon Street and Dampier Terrace, to get a feel for the town. It's not all that Chinese anymore, but most shops, cafes, and galleries are here.

Probably the most popular Dry season pastime is lazing on the 22km (14 miles) of glorious, white sandy **Cable Beach.** The beach is 6km (3¾ miles) out of town; the bus runs there regularly. A beach hut near Cable Beach Club Resort (see "Where to

Stay & Dine," above) rents beach and watersports equipment in the Dry. In the Wet, about November through April, the water is off-limits due to marine stingers—it's incredibly frustrating! Crocodiles, on the other hand, do not like surf, so you should be safe swimming here. Go to the beach for at least one of the magnificent sunsets in the Dry, when the sun sinks into the sea behind the romantic outlines of pearling luggers.

A novel way to experience the beach is on a **camel ride.** Several outfits offer rides; the most popular time is at sunset as the sun drops over the ocean. A 1-hour sunset ride with **Red Sun Camels** (✆ **08/9193 7423**) costs A$40 (US$32) adults, A$25 (US$20) kids 6 to 16. Kids under 6 pay A$10 (US$8), but they must ride with an adult.

Four-time state surf champ **Josh Palmateer** ★ (✆ **0418/958 264** mobile) gives 2-hour surf lessons on the beach in July and August for A$100 (US$80) per person, or A$55 (US$44) per person for two (cheaper if you join a group). He supplies the boards and the wet suits, and the lessons are great fun.

Don't miss the **Pearl Luggers** ★★, 31 Dampier Terrace (✆ **08/9192 2059**). A 75-minute session includes a look over two restored Broome pearling luggers, a browse through a small pearling museum, and a riveting and hilarious talk about pearl diving by former pearl divers. Admission is A$19 (US$15) adults, A$17 (US$14) seniors and students, A$9 (US$7.20) kids 10 to 18. The attraction is open daily April through October from 9am to 5pm, and November through March from 10am to 3:30pm. Tours depart at 9, 11am, 2, and 4pm in the Dry, and 11am and 2pm in the Wet (11am only on weekends). Closed December 25.

A dinosaur footprint 120 million years old is on show at very low tide on the cliff at **Gantheaume Point,** 6km (3¾ miles) from town. The town authorities have set a plaster cast of it higher up on the rocks, so you can see it anytime. Take a picture of the point's palette of glowing red cliffs, white beach, and turquoise water.

You should also take a peek at the haunting **Japanese pearl divers' cemetery** on Port Drive. Admission is free.

During a tour of the **Willie Creek Pearl Farm** (✆ **08/9192 6000**), 38km (24 miles) north of town, you will see the delicate process of an oyster getting "seeded" with a nucleus to form a pearl, learn about pearl farming, and learn what to look for when buying a pearl. You can also buy them in the showroom. The tour costs A$25 (US$20) adults, A$12 (US$9.60) children, and A$65 (US$52) for families of four. You must book the tour ahead whether you drive yourself or not. Tides can cut off the 4WD-only road to the farm; it is wise to take a coach tour, which costs A$59 (US$47) adults, A$30 (US$24) children 6 to 16, including the pearl-farm tour. Tours run April to September daily and from October to March Monday, Wednesday to Friday, and Sunday.

If you have not seen any crocs in the wild, you can take a 1-hour tour at the **Broome Crocodile Park,** next to Cable Beach Club Resort, Cable Beach Road (✆ **08/9193 7824**). Admission is A$15 (US$12) for adults, A$12 (US$9.60) for seniors and students, A$8 (US$6.40) for kids 5 to 15, and A$38 (US$30) for families. Tours run once or twice daily, but hours vary with the seasons, so call ahead.

Several art galleries sell vivid oil and watercolor Kimberley landscapes and a small range of Aboriginal art. **Matso's,** 60 Hamersley St. (✆ **08/9193 5811**), stocks the biggest range of European and Aboriginal paintings, sculpture, pottery, carvings, and books in a historic pearling master's house, and has a lovely veranda cafe and boutique brewery turning out unusual recipes like chile beer. It opens daily from 10am to 5pm, meals from 8am.

On Saturday from 8am to 1pm, browse the **markets** in the gardens of the colonial courthouse at the corner of Frederick and Hamersley streets. It used to be the official station for the cable from Broome to Java. Don't bet the ranch on this tale being gospel, but locals like to tell you that when the British authorities packed up the building materials for the courthouse in Britain and addressed it to "The Kimberley," they meant them to end up in the Kimberley, South Africa. Instead, the stuff arrived in the Kimberley, Australia. The town kept the building and so can proudly lay claim to having Australia's only Zulu-proof courthouse.

A number of boats run sunset cruises on Roebuck Bay or off Cable Beach. Fishing for *trevally,* Spanish mackerel, barracuda, barramundi, queenfish, tuna, shark, sailfish, marlin, salmon (May–Aug), and reef fish is excellent around Broome; fly and sport fishing is also worth a try. Rent tackle and try your luck from the deep-water jetty near Town Beach 2km (1¼ miles) south of town, or join one of several charter boats, such as **FAD Game Fishing Charters** (✆ **0410/649 135** mobile; www.fadcharters.com.au), for a day trip. **Pearl Sea Coastal Cruises** (✆ **08/9193 6131;** fax 08/9193 6303; www.pearlseacruises.com) runs live-aboard fishing trips up the coast. Cyclones, rain, high winds, and strong tides can restrict fishing December through March.

More than one-third of Australia's bird species live in the Kimberley. The blue, green, yellow, and violet Gouldian finch; Nankeen night heron; tawny frogmouth; and hundreds more species get "twitchers" (the local term for bird-watchers) excited. **The Broome Bird Observatory** research station (✆ **08/9193 5600**), 25km (16 miles) out of town on Roebuck Bay, monitors the thousands of migratory wetlands birds that gather here from Siberia. Admission is A$5 (US$4) per person, and it also offers a range of tours. A 2½-hour tour from Broome costs A$73 (US$58) per person (or A$48/US$38 self-drive). There are basic accommodations and camping facilities at the observatory.

Australia's First Family of pearling, the Paspaleys, sell their wonderfully elegant jewelry at **Paspaley Pearls,** Carnarvon Street at Short Street (✆ **08/9192 2203**). **Linneys** (✆ **08/9192 2430**) and **Broome Pearls** (✆ **08/9192 1295**) are other reputable jewelers nearby.

Don't leave without taking in a recent-release movie at the wonderful **Sun Pictures** outdoor cinema, Carnarvon Street near Short Street (✆ **08/9192 1077**). Built in 1916, these are the oldest "picture gardens" in the world, where the audience sits in (saggy) canvas deckchairs. Films are even screened through the rain in the Wet. Tickets are A$12 (US$9.60). Open nightly except Christmas.

# 11

# Adelaide & South Australia

*by Marc Llewellyn*

Adelaide (pop. 1 million) has a major advantage over the other state capitals in that it has Outback, vineyards, wetlands, animal sanctuaries, a major river, and mountain ranges virtually on its doorstep. Meals and lodgings are cheaper in Adelaide than in Sydney or Melbourne. If you plan to travel outside the city, a trip to one of the wine-growing areas has to be on your itinerary. Of all the wine areas, the **Barossa Valley** is the most interesting. Centered on Tanunda, the Barossa is known for its German architecture as well as its dozens of pretty hamlets, fine restaurants, and vineyards offering cellar-door tastings.

If you want to see animals instead of, or in addition to, grapes, you're in luck. You're likely to come across the odd kangaroo or wallaby near the main settlements, especially at dusk, or you could visit one of the area's wildlife reserves. Otherwise, head into the Outback or over to **Kangaroo Island,** without a doubt the best place in Australia to see concentrated numbers of native animals in the wild.

Another place well worth visiting is the craggy **Flinders Ranges,** some 460km (285 miles) north of Adelaide. Though the scenery along the way is mostly unattractive grazing properties devoid of trees, the Flinders Ranges offer an incredible landscape of multicolored rocks, rough-and-ready characters, and even camel treks in the semidesert. On the other side of the mountains, the real Outback starts.

The **South Australian Outback** is serenely beautiful, with giant skies, red earth, little water, and wildflowers after the rains. Out here you'll find opal-mining towns, such as **Coober Pedy,** where summer temperatures can reach 122°F (50°C) and where people live underground to escape the heat.

If you prefer your landscape with more moisture, head to the **Coorong,** a waterbird sanctuary rivaled only by Kakadu National Park in the Northern Territory (see chapter 9).

## EXPLORING THE STATE

**VISITOR INFORMATION** **The South Australian Visitor & Travel Centre,** 18 King William St. (✆ **1300/655 276** in Australia, or 08/8303 2033; fax 08/8303 2249; www.southaustralia.com), is the best place to find information on Adelaide and South Australia. It's open weekdays from 8:30am to 5pm and weekends from 9am to 2pm. There's also an information booth at the King William Street end of Rundle Mall.

For general information about South Australia's national parks, contact the **Department of Environment and Natural Resources Information Centre,** Australis House, 77 Grenfell St., Adelaide, SA 5000 (✆ **08/8204 1910**). It's open Monday through Friday from 9am to 5pm.

**GETTING AROUND** South Australia, at four times the size of the United Kingdom, has a lot of empty space between places of interest. The best way to see it is by car. Limited rail service connects Adelaide with some areas. The Stuart Highway bisects the state from south to north; it runs from Adelaide through the industrial center of Port Augusta (gateway to the Flinders Ranges), and through Coober Pedy to Alice Springs in the Red Centre. The Eyre Highway travels westward along the coastline and into Western Australia, and the Barrier Highway enters New South Wales just before the mining city of Broken Hill (see chapter 5). The Princes Highway takes you east to Melbourne. If you plan to drive into the Outback regions, contact the **Royal Automobile Association of South Australia (RAA),** 41 Hindmarsh Sq., Adelaide, SA 5000 (✆ **13 11 11** in South Australia, or 08/8202 4500; www.raa.net). The RAA provides route maps and emergency breakdown service.

**Greyhound Australia** (✆ **13 14 99** in Australia, or 07/4690 9950; www.greyhound.com.au) operates bus service to and around South Australia. Within the state, the largest operator is **Premier Stateliner** (✆ **08/8415 5500;** www.premierstateliner.com.au). It runs a half-day city sights tour of Adelaide costing A$45 (US$36) for adults and A$23 (US$18) for kids 4 to 14; a day trip to the Barossa Valley costing A$79 (US$63) for adults, and A$40 (US$32) for kids; a 2-day trip to the Barossa Valley with accommodations for A$210 (US$168) for adults and A$165 (US$132) for kids; a half-day trip to Hahndorf for A$45 (US$36) for adults and A$23 (US$18) for kids; and a day trip to the River Murray, including a boat cruise, costing A$105 (US$84) for adults and A$49 (US$39) for kids.

The YHA website, www.yha.org.au, is a good place to start if you want good deals on tours throughout the state (with dorm or double/family room accommodations). Examples include a 2-night stop on Kangaroo Island with ferry and accommodations, plus a day's touring, for A$225 (US$180); and a day trip to the Barossa Valley, with time put aside for wine tasting at two vineyards, for A$118 (US$94).

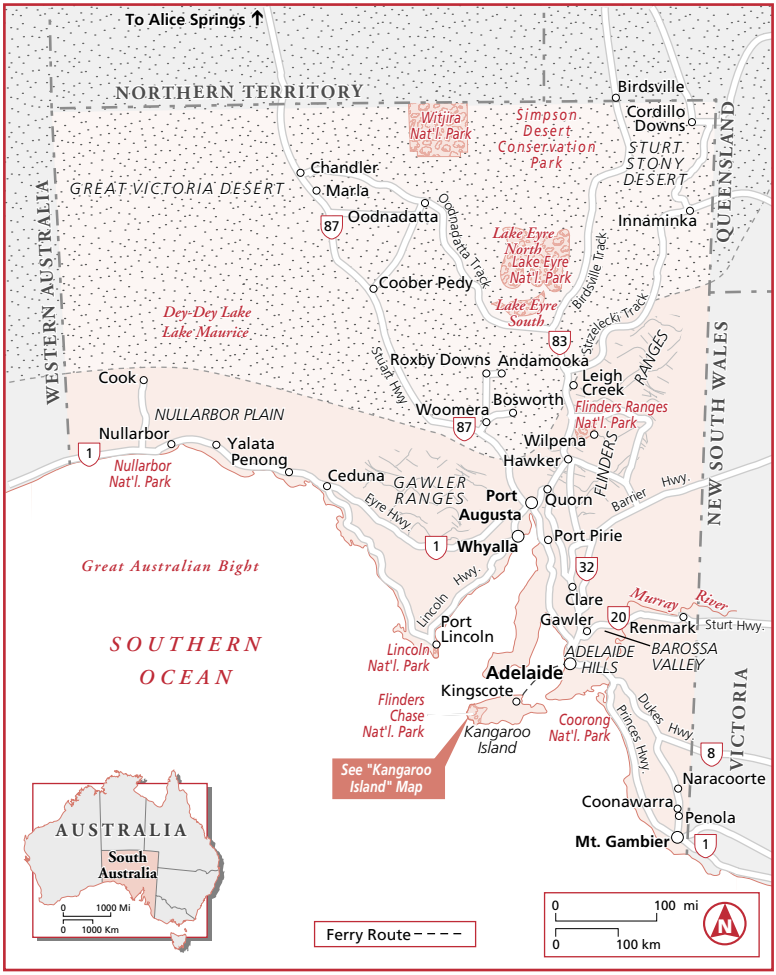
## 1 Adelaide

Adelaide has a reputation as a quieter place than some of the other state capitals and relishes the peace of its parklands and surrounding vineyards. In many ways it's something of a throwback to the comfortable lifestyle of 1950s Australia—a lifestyle that the more progressive state capitals have left behind.

Numerous parks and gardens, wide tree-lined streets, the River Torrens running through its center, sidewalk cafes, colonial architecture, and, of course, the churches help make the "city of churches" a pleasant, open city, perfect for strolling or bicycling.

Though the immigrant population has added a cosmopolitan flair to the restaurant scene, Adelaide still has a feeling of old England about it. That's not surprising when you learn that Adelaide was the only capital settled by English free settlers rather than convicts and that it attracted more after World War II, when Brits flocked here to work in the city's car and appliance factories.

But it was earlier immigrants, from Germany, who gave Adelaide and the surrounding area a romantic twist. Arriving as refugees fleeing religious strife in their country in the 1830s, German immigrants brought winemaking skills and established wineries. Today, more than one-third of all Australian wine—including some of the world's best—comes from areas within about an hour's drive from Adelaide. As a result, Adelaidians of all socioeconomic groups are more versed in wine than even the French and can compare vintages, wine-growing regions, and winemaking trends.




Any season is a good time to visit Adelaide, though May through August can be chilly and January and February hot.

## ESSENTIALS

**GETTING THERE** **By Plane** **Qantas** (✆ **13 13 13** in Australia, or 800/227-4500 in the U.S. and Canada; www.qantas.com.au) flies to Adelaide from the other major state capitals. The discount carrier **Virgin Blue** (✆ **13 67 89** in Australia, or 07/3295 2296; www.virginblue.com.au) flies direct from Melbourne, with connections from other state capitals and some major towns. Check the website for cheap deals. Jetstar (✆ **131 538** in Australia, or 03/8341 4901; www.jetstar.com.au), a Qantas discount subsidiary, flies to Adelaide from Hobart, the Gold Coast, and Cairns. As with Virgin Blue, it offers excellent deals on the Web.

Adelaide International Airport is 5km (3 miles) west of the city center. Major car-rental companies (Avis, Budget, Hertz, and Thrifty) have desks in both the international and domestic terminals.

The **Skylink** (✆ **08/8332 0528;** www.coachaust.com.au) connects the airport with major hotels and the rail and bus stations. On weekdays, buses leave the terminals at 30-minute intervals from 5:30am to 9:30pm, and on weekends and public holidays hourly (on the half-hour). Adult tickets are A$7.50 (US$6) one-way, A$13 (US$11) round-trip. Children's tickets cost A$2.50 (US$2) each way.

**By Taxi** A taxi to the city will cost around A$19 (US$15).

**By Train** The **Keswick Interstate Rail Passenger Terminal,** 2km (1¼ miles) west of the city center, is Adelaide's main railway station. The terminal has a small snack bar and a cafe. Contact **Great Southern Railways** (✆ **13 21 47** in Australia, or 08/8213 4592; www.gsr.com.au) for information, timetables, fares, and bookings for all trains described below.

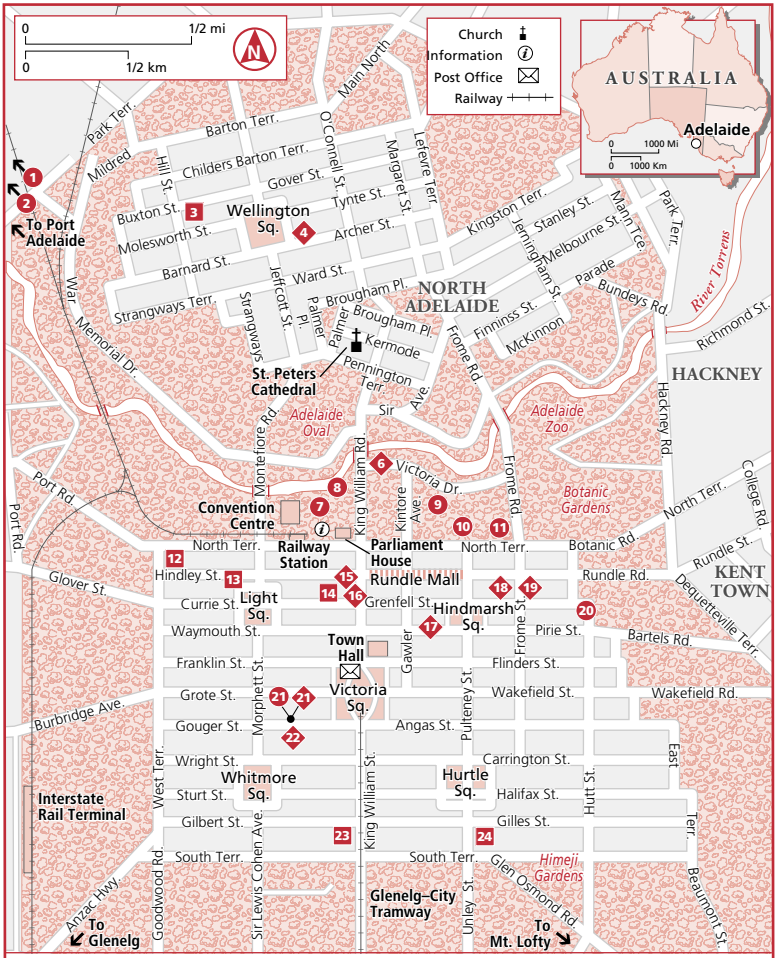
One of the great trains of Australia, the ***Indian Pacific*** takes passengers from Sydney to Adelaide (trip time: 28 hr.) and from Perth to Adelaide (trip time: 36 hr.) twice a week, on Monday and Thursday. One-way tickets from Sydney to Adelaide are A$590 (US$472) for adults and A$465 (US$372) for children in first class, A$450 (US$360) for adults and A$325 (US$260) for children in an economy sleeper, and A$225 (US$180) for adults and A$109 (US$87) for children in coach. From Perth to Adelaide the one-way fare is A$1,250 (US$1,000) for adults and A$850 (US$680) for children in first class, A$960 (US$768) for adults and A$576 (US$461) for children in economy sleeper, and A$309 (US$247) for adults and A$155 (US$124) for children in coach.

The other legendary Australian train is the ***Ghan,*** which runs from Adelaide to Alice Springs and onto Darwin weekly November through April, twice a week May through October, and has three weekly return services from Adelaide to Alice Springs in the peak season of May through July. Trip time from Alice Springs to Adelaide is 20 hours. From Alice Springs to Adelaide and vice versa, the one-way fare is A$890 (US$712) for adults and A$605 (US$484) for children in first class, A$680 (US$544) for adults and A$408 (US$326) for children in an economy sleeper, and A$215 (US$172) for adults and A$97 (US$78) for children for an economy seat. From Adelaide to Darwin (trip time: 24 hours), it costs A$1,830 (US$1,464) for adults and A$1,244 (US$995) for kids in first class, A$1,390 (US$1,112) for adults and A$834 (US$667) for kids in an economy sleeper, and A$440 (US$352) for adults and A$198 (US$158) for kids in an economy seat. It's a hard trip in an economy sleeper though, and all those old socks make it smelly.

The round-trip fare for the *Indian Pacific* and *Ghan* works out to twice the one-way fare or just a few dollars cheaper. Full-time students with a recognized student card from any institution travel for child prices, or just a little more, on all trains. Backpackers and students should consider the Great Southern Railway Pass, which allows unlimited economy seating travel on the *Ghan*, *Indian Pacific,* and *Overland* (see below) for 6 months. It costs A$450 (US$360). Those without a student card can still travel in the same conditions for A$590 (US$472).

The *Overland* operates four weekly round-trips. It offers daylight service from Adelaide to Melbourne and overnight service from Melbourne to Adelaide (trip time: 12 hr.). From Melbourne to Adelaide, one-way ticket prices are A$175 (US$140) for adults and A$139 (US$111) for children in first class, and A$59 (US$47) for adults

# Adelaide




**ACCOMMODATIONS**

- Adelaide City Park Motel **24**
- City Centre Motel **14**
- Moore's Brecknock Hotel **23**
- North Adelaide Heritage Group **3**
- Rockford Adelaide **13**
- Saville Park Suites **12**

**DINING**

- Amalfi **19**
- Austral Hotel **18**
- Central Markets **21**
- Jasmin Indian Restaurant **17**
- Jolleys Boathouse Restaurant **6**
- The Manse **4**
- Matsuri **22**
- Mekong Thai **15**
- Rigoni's Bistro **16**

**ATTRACTIONS**

- Adelaide Casino **7**
- Adelaide Festival Centre **8**
- Art Gallery of South Australia **11**
- Central Markets **21**
- The Migration Museum **9**
- National Railway Museum **2**
- South Australian Maritime Museum **1**
- South Australian Museum **10**
- Tandanya Aboriginal Cultural Institute **20**

### Tips The Adelaide & Womadelaide Festivals

Adelaide is home to Australia's largest performing arts festival, the **Adelaide Festival,** which takes place over 3 weeks in March during even-numbered years. The festival includes literary and visual arts as well as dance, opera, classical music, jazz, cabaret, and comedy. The festival encompasses Writers' Week and the **Adelaide Fringe Festival.**

In February and March each year, the 3-day **Womadelaide Festival** of world music takes place. Crowds of 60,000 or more turn up to watch Australian and international artists. For more information, visit www.adelaidefestival.org.au, www.adelaidefringe.com.au, and www.womadelaide.com.au.

and A$42 (US$34) for children in an economy seat. It's a little cheaper from Adelaide to Melbourne, and there are good round-trip discounts.

**By Bus** Intercity coaches serve the central bus station, 101 Franklin St. (✆ **08/8415 5533**), near Morphett Street in the city center. **Greyhound Australia** (✆ **13 14 99** in Australia, or 07/4690 9950; www.greyhound.com.au) runs buses between Adelaide and all other major cities. The trip from Melbourne takes 11 hours and costs around A$60 (US$48); from Sydney, 25 hours and A$130 (US$104); and from Alice Springs, 21 hours and A$180 (US$144). Discounts are available for children and students.

Adventurous types should try the **Wayward Bus Touring Company,** P.O. Box 7076, Adelaide, SA 5000 (✆ **1800/882 823** in Australia, or 08/8232 6646; www.waywardbus.com.au). It offers several tours leaving Adelaide, including an 8-day Face the Outback tour between Adelaide and Alice Springs, via Uluru/Ayers Rock, the Olgas, Kings Canyon, Coober Pedy, Lake Eyre, and the Flinders Ranges. It's a mixture of camping, sleeping in a swag (a heavy sleeping bag), and hostels. The trip costs A$790 (US$632) per adult with discounts for children 15 and younger. Another great trip is the 3½-day Classic Coast tour, from Adelaide to Melbourne, taking in the Great Ocean Road and the Coorong (costing from A$295/US$236 per adult [16 and older] depending on accommodations options).

Another bus company, the **Nullarbor Traveller,** P.O. Box 72, Glensside, SA 5065 (✆ **08/8364 0407;** www.the-traveller.com.au), takes adventurous travelers from Adelaide to Perth in 9 days across the Nullarbor Plain. The tour includes a mixture of camping and pub accommodations and most meals. It costs A$995 (US$796). A good area website is **www.nullarbornet.com.au**.

**By Car** To drive from Sydney to Adelaide on the Hume and Sturt highways takes roughly 20 hours; from Melbourne it takes around 10 hours on the Great Ocean Road and Princes Highway; from Perth it takes 32 hours on the Great Eastern and Princes highways; and from Alice Springs it takes 15 hours on the remote Stuart Highway. For more information on driving distances, consult www.auinfo.com/distancecalc_process.asp.

**VISITOR INFORMATION** Go to the **South Australian Visitor & Travel Centre,** 18 King William St. (✆ **1300/655 276** in Australia, or 08/8303 2033; fax 08/8303 2249; www.southaustralia.com), for maps, travel advice, and hotel and tour bookings. It's open weekdays from 8:30am to 5pm, weekends from 9am to 2pm. The info booth on Rundle Mall (✆ **08/8203 7611**) is open daily from 10am to 5pm. The

Port Adelaide Visitor Information Centre is at 66 Commercial Rd., Port Adelaide (✆ **08/8405 6560**). Adelaide City Guides, dressed in green uniforms, hang out around Rundle Mall, too.

**CITY LAYOUT** Adelaide is easy to navigate because of its gridlike pattern, planned down to each wide street and airy square by Colonel William Light in 1836. The city's official center is **Victoria Square,** where you'll find the Town Hall. Bisecting the city from south to north is the main thoroughfare, **King William Street.** Streets running perpendicular to King William Street change their names on either side; Franklin Street, for example, changes into Flinders Street. Of these cross streets, the most interesting are the restaurant strips of **Gouger Street** and **Rundle Street,** the latter running into the pedestrian-only shopping precinct of Rundle Mall. Another is **Hindley Street,** with inexpensive restaurants and nightlife. On the banks of the River Torrens just north of the city center, you'll find the Riverbank Precinct, the home of the Festival Centre, the Convention Centre, and the Skycity Adelaide Casino. Bordering the city center on the north and south are **North Terrace,** which is lined with galleries and museums and leads to the Botanic Gardens, and **South Terrace.**

Follow King William Street south and you'll be chasing the tram to the beachside suburb of **Glenelg;** follow it north, and it crosses the River Torrens and flows into sophisticated **North Adelaide,** an area crammed with Victorian and Edwardian architecture. The main avenues in North Adelaide, **O'Connell** and **Melbourne streets,** are lined with restaurants, cafes, and bistros that offer the tastes of a multicultural city.

Northwest of the city center is **Port Adelaide,** a seaport and the historic maritime heart of South Australia. It's home to some of the finest colonial buildings in the state, as well as good pubs and restaurants.

**GETTING AROUND** **By Bus** Adelaide's public bus network covers three zones, and fares are calculated according to the number of zones traveled. The city center is in Zone 1. The fare in Zone 1 from 9am to 3pm on weekdays is A$2 (US$1.60) for adults and A$1 (US80¢) for kids ages 5 to 14, and A$3.40 (US$2.70) for adults and A$1.60 (US$1.30) for kids 5 to 14 at most other times. You buy tickets on board or at kiosks around the city. Tickets must be validated on board in the special machine. You can get timetable and destination information over the phone or in person from the **Passenger Transport Board Information Centre** (✆ **08/8210 1000;** www.adelaidemetro.com.au), on the corner of Currie and King William streets. It's open Monday through Friday from 8am to 6pm, Saturday from 9am to 5pm, and Sunday 11am to 4pm. If you plan to get around the city on public transportation, it's a good idea to purchase a **Daytrip ticket,** which covers unlimited travel on buses, trams, and city trains within the metropolitan area for 1 day. The pass costs A$6.40 (US$5.15) for adults and A$3.20 (US$2.55) for children 5 to 15, and is available at most train stations, newsstands, and the Passenger Transport Board Information Centre.

The free **CityLoop bus** (no. 99C) operates every 15 minutes (Mon–Thurs 8:30am–6pm; Fri 8:30am–9pm; Sat 8:30am–5pm) around the city center, along North Terrace, East Terrace, Grenfell Street, Pulteney Street, Wakefield Street, Grote Street, Morphett Street, Light Square, Hindley Street, and West Terrace. Another free bus, the **Bee Line** (no. 99B), runs along North Terrace, down King William Street to Victoria Square. Routes are well signposted. All free city buses are wheelchair accessible.

Bus nos. 181 and 182 run from the city to North Adelaide.

The **Adelaide Explorer bus** (✆ **08/8293 2966;** www.adelaideexplorer.com.au) stops at 26 sights around town, including Glenelg, and costs A$30 (US$24) for

adults, A$19 (US$15) for children, and A$70 (US$56) for families of four. Buy tickets on the bus. The loop takes a leisurely 3 hours, with commentary, and you can get on and off when you want. The first bus departs from 38 King William St., on the corner of Rundle Mall (next to Haigh's Chocolates) at 9am. The company will pick you up from your hotel between 8 and 8:30am if you call ahead and will drop you off at the airport (with your luggage) as part of the fare. Call or e-mail ahead. The last loop starts at 1:30pm, ending at 4:30pm.

**By Tram** The **Glenelg Tram** runs between Victoria Square and the beachside suburb of Glenelg. Tickets cost A$3.60 (US$2.90) for adults and A$1.60 (US$1.30) for children 5 to 14 from 9am to 3pm. The journey takes 29 minutes.

**By Taxi & Car** The major cab companies are **Yellow Cabs** (✆ **13 22 27** in South Australia), **Suburban** (✆ **08/8211 8888**), and **Amalgamated** (✆ **08/8223 3333**). **Access Cabs** (✆ **1300/360 940** in South Australia) offers wheelchair taxis.

Major car-rental companies are **Avis,** 136 North Terrace (✆ **08/8410 5727**); **Budget,** 274 North Terrace (✆ **08/8223 1400**); **Hertz,** 233 Morphett St. (✆ **08/8231 2856**); and **Thrifty,** 296 Hindley St. (✆ **08/8211 8788**).

The **Royal Automobile Association of South Australia (RAA),** 41 Hindmarsh Sq. (✆ **13 11 11** in South Australia, or 08/8202 4500; www.raa.net), has route maps and provides emergency breakdown services.

## *FAST FACTS:* Adelaide

***American Express*** Amex has two Adelaide locations—one at Shop 32, CitiCentre Arcade, Rundle Mall, and the other at 2 King William St. Both are open Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm, and Saturday 9am to noon.

***Business Hours*** Generally, banks are open Monday through Thursday from 9:30am to 4pm and Friday from 9:30am to 5pm. Stores are generally open Monday through Thursday from 9am to 5:30pm, Friday from 9am to 9pm, Saturday from 9am to 5pm, and Sunday from 11am to 5pm.

***Currency Exchange*** Banks and hotels, the casino, and the Myer department store in Rundle Mall cash traveler's checks. The **Thomas Cook** office is at Shop 4, Rundle Mall (✆ **08/82316977**). It's open Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm, and Saturday from 10am to 4pm.

***Dentist*** Contact the **Australian Dental Association Emergency Information Service** (✆ **08/8272 8111**), open weeknights from 5 to 9pm, and Saturday and Sunday from 9am to 9pm. It will put you in touch with a dentist. You can also contact the office of **Dr. Brook,** 231 North Terrace (✆ **08/8223 6988**), during normal business hours.

***Doctor*** Contact the **Royal Adelaide Hospital,** North Terrace (✆ **08/8222 4000**). **The Travellers' Medical & Vaccination Centre,** 29 Gilbert Place (✆ **08/8212 7522**), offers vaccinations and travel-related medicines.

***Emergencies*** Dial ✆ **000** to call an ambulance, the fire department, or the police in an emergency.

***Hospitals*** The **Royal Adelaide Hospital,** North Terrace (✆ **08/8222 4000**), is in the city center.

***Hot Lines*** The **Crisis Care Centre** (✆ 13 16 11 in Australia); the **Royal Automobile Association of South Australia,** or RAA (✆ 08/8202 4500); the **Disability Information and Resource Centre** (✆ 08/8223 7522).

***Internet Access*** The **Ngapartji Multimedia Centre,** 211 Rundle St. (✆ **08/8232 0839**), offers e-mail and Internet access Monday through Thursday from 8:30am to 9pm, Friday and Saturday from 9am to 10pm, and Sunday from noon to 7pm. Other access points on Hindley Street: **Talking Cents,** 53 Hindley St. (✆ **08/8212 1266**), and **Café Boulevard,** 13 Hindley St. (✆ **08/8231 5734**).

***Lost Property*** If you've lost something on the street, contact the nearest police station. For items left on public transport, contact the **Lost Property Office,** on the main concourse of the Adelaide Railway Station on North Terrace (✆ **08/8218 2552**); it's open Monday through Friday from 9am to 5pm.

***Luggage Storage & Lockers*** There are luggage lockers at Adelaide Airport in the domestic terminal. At the **Central Bus Station** on Franklin Street (✆ **08/8415 5533**), luggage lockers cost A$2 (US$1.60) for 24 hours.

***Pharmacies (Chemist Shops)*** **Burden Chemists,** Shop 11, Southern Cross Arcade, King William Street. (✆ **08/8231 4701**), is open Monday through Thursday from 8am to 6pm, Friday from 8am to 8pm, and Saturday from 9am to 1pm.

***Post Office*** The **General Post Office (GPO),** 141 King William St., Adelaide, SA 5000 (✆ **08/8216 2222**), is open Monday through Friday from 8am to 6pm and Saturday from 8:30am to noon. General delivery mail can be collected Monday through Friday from 8am to 5pm and Saturday 8:30am to noon.

***Restrooms*** Public restrooms are at the Central Market, between Grote and Gouger streets, in both Hindmarsh and Victoria squares, and at James Place (off Rundle Mall).

***Safety*** Adelaide is a safe city, though it's wise to avoid walking along the River Torrens and through side streets near Hindley Street after dark.

## ACCOMMODATIONS YOU CAN AFFORD

The **South Australian Visitor & Travel Centre** (see "Visitor Information," above) can supply information on B&Bs and homestays around the state. Satellite or cable TV is rare in South Australian hotels, though some provide pay-per-view movies.

A good budget option is the Adelaide Central YHA hostel, 135 Waymouth St., Adelaide 5000 (✆ **08/8414 3010;** www.yha.org.au). As well as dorms, costing from A$23 (US$18) per person, it has 22 double rooms (costing A$60/US$48 with shared bathroom and A$75/US$60 with private bathroom), and 9 family rooms (costing

### Tips Plan Ahead

If you plan to be in town during the Adelaide Festival, make sure you book accommodations well in advance. The town can be packed during Christmas and New Year's, so it's wise to book well in advance then, too.

from A$75/US$60). There are other YHA hostels in both Mylor and Mount Lofty in the Adelaide Hills, the Barossa Valley, the Flinders Ranges, and on Kangaroo Island.

## IN THE CITY CENTRE

**Adelaide City Park Motel** The spacious rooms in this three-and-a-half-star boutique motel have modern furnishings and nice bathrooms with showers. Some rooms have private balconies overlooking parkland. Family rooms sleep from four to six people: The largest has a double bed and two sets of bunks. The best double room is no. 45, which has two double beds and a large balcony.

471 Pulteney St., Adelaide, SA 5000. ✆ **1800/231 444** in Australia, or 08/8223 1444. Fax 08/8223 1133. www.citypark.com.au. 18 units. A$88 (US$70) double without bathroom; A$99 (US$79) double with bathroom; A$130 (US$104) double with balcony; A$110–A$130 (US$88–US$104) triple; A$120–A$180 (US$96–US$144) family. Extra person A$15 (US$12). AE, DC, MC, V. Limited parking by arrangement. The tram to Glenelg is 5 minutes' walk away; 4 streets up is a bus stop for the free City Loop Bus. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; tour desk; car-rental desk; dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, coffeemaker, iron, microwave.

**City Central Motel** This Australian Automobile Association–rated two-and-a-half star motel is centrally located near Rundle Mall, and though not the least bit glamorous, it's perfectly fine for a few nights' stay. Rooms are clean, simple, and smallish, and a set of bunks—as well as a double bed or twin beds—make them perfect for families on a budget. The communal balcony is a pleasant place to watch the world go by.

23 Hindley St., Adelaide, SA 5000. ✆ **08/8231 4049.** www.arta.com.au/ccentral.html. 12 units. A$70 (US$56) single; A$75 (US$60) double; A$79 (US$63) twin. AE, MC, V. Free parking. Free City Loop Bus. **Amenities:** Nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, coffeemaker, toaster.

**Moore's Brecknock Hotel** Adelaide's original Irish pub, built in 1851, still attracts a lot of Irish patrons who come here for the great selection of beer and reasonably priced home-style cooking—it reputedly serves Adelaide's best hamburgers. It's also very popular with American guests who use the hotel accommodations upstairs as a base from which to discover Kangaroo Island and other parts of the state. The Brecknock, about 4 blocks from Victoria Square, is run by Kerry Moore and his Canadian wife, Tricia. Live bands play downstairs on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, but the music finishes at 1am on Friday and Saturday and at 10pm on Sunday, so you shouldn't have too much trouble sleeping. Rooms are large, if a little spartan, and decorated in your granny's old-world style. Some rooms have a single bed as well as a double. Each has a sink, with the bathrooms down the hall.

401 King William St., Adelaide, SA 5000. ✆ **08/8231 5467.** Fax 08/8410 1968. www.brecknockhotel.com.au. 10 units, none with bathroom. A$70 (US$56) double; A$90 (US$72) triple. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. Tram: Glenelg route. **Amenities:** Restaurant; 3 bars; bike rental; tour desk; car-rental desk; coin-op laundry; dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, fax, fridge, coffeemaker, iron, safe.

**Rockford Adelaide** *Value* Totally refurbished in 2002, the Rockford Adelaide is a boutique hotel with a business leaning. It's a 10- to 15-minute walk from the center of town, 5 minutes from the casino, and near the nightclub and red-light district. Rooms are spacious, comfortable, and modern. Executive rooms come with a spa bath. It's a good value option if you like things neat and businesslike.

164 Hindley St., Adelaide, SA 5000. ✆ **1800/606 562** in Australia, or 08/8211 8255. Fax 08/8231 1179. www.rockfordhotels.com.au. 68 units. A$135 (US$108) standard double; A$172 (US$138) business double; A$182 (US$146) executive double. Children under 12 stay free in parent's room. Off-season and weekend discounts available. Check for Internet specials. Ask about package deals. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. Free City Loop Bus. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; heated outdoor pool; golf course nearby; access to nearby health club; sauna; concierge; limited room service; laundry service; dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, DVD player w/free movies, dataport, minibar, hair dryer, iron.

**Saville Park Suites Adelaide** ★ You can't miss this conglomerate of russet-red bricks on the outskirts of the city center (about a 10-min. walk). Rooms are nice and spacious, if a bit formal, which is not surprising because the place is popular with business travelers. On the premises are the Zipp Restaurant and a pleasant wine bar.

255 Hindley St., Adelaide, SA 5000. ✆ **1800/882 601** in Australia, or 08/8217 2500. Fax 08/8217 2519. www.savillesuites.com. 142 units. A$146 (US$117) studio for 2; A$167 (US$134) 2-bedroom suite for up to 4. The website has day-by-day deals. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking A$5 (US$4). City Loop Bus. **Amenities:** Restaurant; free access to nearby City Gym; outdoor Jacuzzi; concierge; tour desk; car-rental desk; limited room service; babysitting; coin-op laundry; dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, VCR (on request), dataport, kitchen, minibar, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

## IN NORTH ADELAIDE

This suburb across the river is an interesting place with nice architecture and good restaurants. It's about a 10-minute bus ride from the city center.

**Princes Lodge Motel** One of the best budget motels in Adelaide, the Princes Lodge looks more like a large private home than a simple brick roadside structure. Rooms are simple but relatively nicely decorated and generally come with a double and a single bed. There are three family rooms; one has a double and three singles, and another has six beds in one room. The motel is within walking distance of the restaurant strip on O'Connell Street, on a bus route that follows King William Street, and is an A$8 (US$6.40) taxi ride from the city center.

73 Lefevre Terrace, North Adelaide, 5006. ✆ **08/8267 5566.** Fax 08/8239 0787. www.princeslodge.com.au. 21 units. A$60 (US$48) double with separate private bathroom; A$72 (US$58) double with attached bathroom; A$77 (US$62) double (queen-size bed) with attached bathroom. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Bus: 222 from Victoria Sq. **Amenities:** Golf course nearby; tour desk; car-rental desk; coin-op laundry. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

### Worth a Splurge

**North Adelaide Heritage Group** ★★★ *Finds* It's worth coming all the way to Adelaide for the experience of staying in one of these out-of-this-world apartments, cottages, or suites. Each of the 21 properties in North Adelaide and Eastwood are fabulous. I particularly recommend the former Friendly Meeting Chapel Hall, once the headquarters of the "Albert Lodge No. 6 of the Independent Order of Oddfellows, Manchester Unity Friendly Society, and the Court Huntsman's Pride No. 2478 of the Ancient Order of Foresters Friendly Society." The structure, a small, simple gabled hall of bluestone rubble trimmed with brick, resembles a small church. Built in 1878, it's stocked with period pieces and antiques and rounded off with a modern, fully stocked kitchen; a huge Jacuzzi; a queen-size bed; and a CD player and TV.

Another standout place is the George Lowe Esquire unit in the Buxton Manor. The huge 19th-century apartment is decorated with antiques and has a huge four-poster bed, a lounge, and a full kitchen. Guests also have use of nice gardens. Owners Rodney and Regina Twiss have added little touches that make you feel at home, from magazines liberally piled everywhere to bacon and eggs in the fridge. The company also offers three apartments in the old North Adelaide Fire Station; the ground-floor apartment comes with a full-size, bright red, very old fire engine. All properties are within easy walking distance of the main attractions in the area, as well as tennis courts (around A$20/US$16 an hour) and Adelaide Golf Links (✆ **08/8267 2171;** A$18/US$14 weekdays, A$21/US$17 weekends).

Office: 109 Glen Osmond Rd., Eastwood, SA 5063. ✆ **08/8272 1355.** Fax 08/8272 1355. www.adelaideheritage.com. 21 units. A$145–A$330 (US$116–US$264) double. Extra adult A$60–A$85 (US$48–US$68); extra child under 12 A$30

(US$24). AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Golf course nearby; tennis courts nearby; Jacuzzi; concierge; car-rental desk; free bus to city center; limited room service; massage; dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV, kitchen, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

### IN GLENELG

I'd recommend, without hesitation, staying in Glenelg rather than in the city center. The journey to the city center by car or tram takes less than 30 minutes, and the airport is less than 10 minutes away. Add to this the sea, the lovely beach, the fun fair (amusement park), the great shops, the good pub, and the nice accommodations, and you have a perfect place to relax on your holiday.

**Atlantic Tower Motor Inn** If you're looking for relatively inexpensive accommodations near the beach, this is your place. You can't miss the tubular building, with its slowly revolving restaurant on the 12th floor. Rooms are simple but bright, and have nice park views through large windows. Each has a double and a single bed. Deluxe rooms are a bit nicer and come with tub/shower combos rather than just showers. Suites have two rooms and excellent views; the most expensive have Jacuzzis. The gently turning Rock Lobster Cafe upstairs is open for lunch on Thursday, Friday, and Sunday, and dinner every evening.

760 Anzac Hwy., Glenelg, SA 5045. ✆ **08/8294 1011.** Fax 08/8376 0964. www.atlantictower.citysearch.com.au. 27 units (20 with shower only). A$96 (US$77) double; A$115 (US$92) deluxe double; A$165 (US$132) suite. Extra person A$12 (US$9.60). Children under 15 stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. Tram: Glenelg route to stop 20. **Amenities:** Restaurant; tour desk; car-rental desk; room service; laundry service; same-day dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, fax, minibar, hair dryer, iron.

## WHERE TO DINE

With more than 600 restaurants, pubs, and cafes, Adelaide boasts more dining spots per capita than anywhere else in Australia. Many cluster in areas such as Rundle Street, Gouger Street, and North Adelaide—where you'll find almost every style of cuisine you can imagine. For cheap noodles, *laksas,* sushi, and cakes, head to Adelaide's **Central Market** (✆ **08/8203 7494;** www.adelaidecitycouncil.com/CentralMarket), behind the Hilton Adelaide between Gouger and Grote streets.

Because of South Australia's healthy wine industry, you'll find that many of the more expensive restaurants have extensive wine lists—though with spicier foods, it's probably wiser to stick with beer or a fruity white in a pinch. Many Adelaide restaurants allow diners to bring their own wine (BYO), but most charge a steep corkage fee to open your bottle—A$6 (US$4.80) or so is not uncommon.

### IN THE CITY CENTER

**Amalfi** ITALIAN Come here for good cooking at reasonable prices in a lively atmosphere. The pizzas are the best in Adelaide—though a little expensive—and good veal and pasta dishes are always on the menu. Be sure to check out the daily specials, where you can pick a very good fish dish or two.

### *Finds* Something Different: Dining Tours

**Adelaide's Top Food and Wine Tours** (✆ **08/8263 0265;** www.topfoodandwinetours.com.au) offers a range of food-based tours including both dawn and mid-morning tours of the Central Market. Tours cost A$48 (US$38) for adults and A$25 (US$20) for kids.

29 Frome St. (just off Rundle St.). ✆ **08/8223 1948.** Reservations recommended. Main courses A$14–A$17 (US$11–US$14). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 11:30am–3pm and 5:30–11pm (until midnight Fri); Sat 5:30pm–midnight.

**Austral Hotel** *Value* MODERN AUSTRALIAN This large pub, with its dark timber and forest-colored wallpaper, is a pleasant place for a well-priced pub meal. You can eat at the bar, outside on the street, or in the dining room. The bistro serves burgers, fish and chips, pastas, *laksas,* and Thai curries. The restaurant is a bit more upscale and offers risotto, handmade crab ravioli, beef filets, chicken dishes, venison, paella, and baby octopus.

205 Rundle St. ✆ **08/8223 4660.** www.theaustral.com. Reservations recommended. Main courses A$6.50–A$14 (US$5.20–US$11) in bistro, A$15–A$22 (US$12–US$18) in restaurant. AE, MC, V. Mon–Sat 11am–late. Bus station nearby.

**Jasmin Indian Restaurant** ★ NORTH INDIAN Prices have crept up as this place has gotten more popular, but this family-run Adelaide institution a block south of Rundle Mall is still a good value. It won the Restaurant Association's award for best Indian restaurant in 2000 and 2001. Indian artifacts and signed cricket bats from visiting Indian teams decorate the walls. The atmosphere is comfortable yet busy, and the service is professional. The house special is very hot beef vindaloo, but all the old favorites, such as tandoori chicken, butter chicken (a big seller), lamb *korma,* and *malabari* beef with coconut cream, ginger, and garlic are here. Mop it all up with naan bread, and cool your palate with a side dish of *raita.* The *suji halwa* (semolina pudding with nuts) is the best I've tasted. I've been going here for a quarter of a century.

31 Hindmarsh Sq. ✆ **08/8223 7837.** Reservations recommended. Main courses A$19–A$20 (US$15–US$16). Lunch banquet A$27 (US$22); dinner banquet A$35 (US$28). AE, DC, MC, V. Tues–Fri noon–2:30pm; Tues–Sat 5:30–10:30pm.

**Jolleys Boathouse Restaurant** ★ MODERN AUSTRALIAN Jolleys is on the banks of the River Torrens, with views of boats, ducks, and black swans. Businesspeople and ladies who lunch rush for the three outside tables, but if you miss out, the bright and airy interior, with its cream-colored tablecloths and directors' chairs, isn't much of a letdown. You might start with goat's curd ravioli with red pesto and chives. Moving on, you could tuck into roasted duck with hazelnut risotto. (Ignore the peaceful quacking out on the river if you can.) Banana and cardamom soufflé for dessert is wicked.

Jolleys Lane. ✆ **08/8223 2891.** Reservations recommended. Main courses A$21–A$27 (US$17–US$22). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily noon–2:30pm; Mon–Sat 6:30–9:30pm.

**Matsuri** ★ JAPANESE I like the atmosphere in this very good restaurant on the popular Gouger Street restaurant strip. Takaomi Kitamura, world-famous ice sculptor and sushi master, prepares the sushi and sashimi dishes, some of the best in Australia. Monday night is "sushi festival night," when sushi is half-price. During happy hour Wednesday through Sunday, sushi is 30% off if you place your order before 7pm. (You can preorder over the phone and eat later.) Promised, too, is a 10% discount if you show this Frommer's guide. Other popular dishes include vegetarian and seafood tempura, *yose nobe* (a hot pot of vegetables, seafood, and chicken), and *chawan mushi* (a steamed custard dish). The service is friendly and considerate. The corkage fee is a steep A$4.50 (US$3.60) a bottle.

167 Gouger St. ✆ **08/8231 3494.** Reservations recommended. Main courses A$8.60–A$28 (US$6.90–US$22). AE, DC, MC, V. Fri noon–2pm; Wed–Mon 5:30–10pm.

**Mekong Thai** *Value* THAI/MALAYSIAN/HALAL Though this place is not much to look at—with simple tables and chairs, some outside in a portico—it has a fiery reputation for good food among in-the-know locals. The food is spicy and authentic, and the portions are filling. It's also a vegetarian's paradise, with at least 16 meat-free mains on the ethnically varied menu. It's Adelaide's only fully halal (suitable for Muslims) restaurant.

68 Hindley St. ✆ **08/8231 2914.** Main courses A$11–A$13 (US$8.80–US$10). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 5:15–10:30pm or later.

**Rigoni's Bistro** ITALIAN On a narrow lane west of King William Street, this traditional Italian trattoria is often packed at lunch and less frantic in the evening. It's big and bright, with high ceilings and russet quarry tiles. A long bar runs through the middle of the dining room; brass plates mark the stools of regular diners. The food is very traditional and quite good. The chalkboard menu often changes, but you are likely to find lasagna, veal in white wine, marinated fish, and various pasta dishes. There's also an extensive salad bar with a variety of antipasto, and an outside dining area.

27 Leigh St. ✆ **08/8231 5160.** Reservations recommended. Main courses A$15–A$22 (US$12–US$18); antipasto bar (lunch only) A$12–A$14 (US$9.60–US$11). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Fri noon–2:30pm; Mon–Sat 6:30–10pm.

### IN NORTH ADELAIDE

#### Worth a Splurge

**The Manse** ★★ FRENCH Swiss chef Bernhard Oehrli has a fine touch when it comes to French-inspired food, and I recommend this place wholeheartedly. The cozy restaurant spreads out into several rooms, with log fires to keep you warm in winter and room to dine outside on sunnier days. I recommend the South Australian crayfish on braised leek tart and crustacean velouté.

142 Tynte St., North Adelaide. ✆ **08/8267 4636.** Reservations recommended. Main courses A$34–A$35 (US$27–US$28). AE, DC, MC, V. Fri noon–3pm (set menu); Mon–Sat 6:30–10pm. Bus: 182, 224, 226, 228, or 229.

## SEEING THE SIGHTS

Adelaide is a laid-back city. It's not jam-packed with tourist-oriented attractions like some of the larger state capitals, though The Migration Museum (see below) is easily one of the best museums in Australia. The best way to enjoy this pleasant city is to take things nice and easy. Walk beside the River Torrens, ride the tram to the beachside suburb of Glenelg, and spend the evenings sipping wine and sampling some of the country's best alfresco dining.

### THE TOP ATTRACTIONS

**Art Gallery of South Australia** ★ Adelaide's premier public art gallery has a good range of local and overseas works and a fine Asian ceramics collection. Of particular interest are Charles Hill's *Proclamation of South Australia 1836;* Nicholas Chevalier's painting of the departure of explorers Burke and Wills from Melbourne; several works by Australian painters Sidney Nolan, Albert Tucker, and Arthur Boyd; and some excellent contemporary art. For an introduction, take a free guided tour. The bookshop has an extensive collection of art publications. Allow 1 to 2 hours.

North Terrace. ✆ **08/8207 7000.** Free admission. Daily 10am–5pm. Guided tours Mon–Fri 11am and 2pm; Sat–Sun 11am and 3pm. Closed Dec 25. Bus: City Loop.

**The Migration Museum** ★ *Finds* This tiny museum, dedicated to immigration and multiculturalism, is one of the most important and fascinating in Australia. With

touching personal displays, it tells the story of the immigrants who have helped shape this multicultural society, from the boatloads of convicts who came here in 1788 to the ethnic groups who have trickled in over the past 2 centuries. Allow 1 hour.

82 Kintore Ave. ✆ **08/8207 7580.** Admission by donation. Mon–Fri 10am–5pm; Sat–Sun and public holidays 1–5pm. Closed Good Friday and Dec 25. Bus: Any to North Terrace.

**The National Wine Centre of Australia** ★ This architectural masterpiece concentrates on Australia's 53 wine regions. Interactive exhibits and displays allow you to blend your own virtual wine. The Tasting Gallery displays an extensive range of Australian wines, and wine-tasting packages allow you to sample some of the rarest vintages. A restaurant and bar overlook the Wine Centre, which has its own vineyard. You can fit in a trip here with a visit to the nearby Botanic Gardens (described below).

Hackney Rd. (eastern end of North Terrace). ✆ **08/8222 9288.** wineaustralia.com.au. Admission A$11 (US$8.80) adults, A$6 (US$4.80) children under 18 accompanied by an adult, A$29 (US$23) families. Wine-tasting packages A$5–A$20 (US$4–US$16). Mon–Fri 9am–5:30pm. Closed Good Friday and Dec 25. Bus: CityLoop to Botanic Gardens.

**South Australian Maritime Museum** This Port Adelaide museum commemorates over 150 years of maritime history. Most of the exhibits are in the 1850s Bond Store, but the museum also incorporates an 1863 lighthouse and two vessels moored alongside Wharf No. 1, a short walk away. Allow 1½ hours. Port Adelaide is approximately 30 minutes from the city center by bus.

126 Lipson St., Port Adelaide. ✆ **08/8207 6255.** Admission A$8.50 (US$6.80) adults, A$3.50 (US$2.80) children, A$22 (US$18) families. Daily 10am–5pm. Closed Dec 25. Bus: 151 or 153 from North Terrace opposite Parliament House to stop 40 (Port Adelaide). Train: Port Adelaide.

**South Australian Museum** ★ The star attraction of this museum is the Australian Aboriginal Cultures Gallery. On display is an extensive collection of utensils, spears, tools, bush medicine, food samples, photographs, and the like. Also in the museum are a sorry-looking collection of stuffed native animals (including a few extinct marsupials, such as the Tasmanian tiger), a collection of Papua New Guinea artifacts, and excellent mineral and butterfly collections.

If you're interested in learning more about the exhibits, take the Behind-the-Scenes Tour, which takes place after museum hours and costs A$12 (US$9.60) for adults. Allow 2 hours to see the museum.

North Terrace, between State Library and Art Gallery of South Australia. ✆ **08/8207 7500.** www.samuseum.sa.gov.au. Free admission. Daily 10am–5pm. Closed Good Friday and Dec 25.

**Tandanya Aboriginal Cultural Institute** ★★ This place offers a great opportunity to experience Aboriginal life through Aboriginal eyes. Exhibits change regularly, but all give insight into Aboriginal art and cultural activities. At noon every day there's a didgeridoo performance. A shop sells Aboriginal art and books on Aboriginal culture, and a cafe on the premises serves several bush tucker (native food) items. Allow 1 hour.

253 Grenfell St. ✆ **08/8224 3200.** Admission A$4 (US$3.20) adults, A$3 (US$2.40) children under 14, A$10 (US$8) families. Daily 10am–5pm. Bus: City Loop.

## THE FLORA & THE FAUNA

**Adelaide Zoo** *Kids* To be honest, if you've experienced the Melbourne Zoo, or even Taronga Zoo in Sydney, the Adelaide Zoo is probably not worth your while. But if this is your only chance to see a kangaroo in captivity, then go. Of course, other Australian animals live at the zoo, and the landscaped gardens and lack of crowds make it

a pleasant place for an entertaining stroll. The zoo houses the only pygmy blue-tongue lizard in captivity in Australia; the species was thought to be extinct since the 1940s, until a specimen was discovered inside the belly of a dead snake. Allow 1 hour.

Frome Rd. ✆ **08/8267 3255.** Admission A$15 (US$12) adults, A$8 (US$6.40) children. Daily 9:30am–5pm. Bus: 272 or 273 from Currie St. to stop 2 (5 min.).

**Botanic Gardens** You'll feel as though you're at the heart of the city when you stroll through the huddles of office workers having picnic lunches on the lawns. Highlights include a broad avenue of Moreton Bay figs, duck ponds, giant water lilies, an Italianate garden, a palm house, and the Bicentennial Conservatory—a glass dome full of rainforest species. You might want to have lunch surrounded by bird song and lush vegetation in the **Botanic Gardens Restaurant** (✆ **08/8223 3526**) in the center of the park; it's open daily from 10am to 5pm.

North Terrace. ✆ **08/8222 9311.** Free admission. Mon–Fri 8am–sundown; Sat–Sun 9am–sundown.

### FOR TRAIN BUFFS

**National Railway Museum** This former Port Adelaide railway yard houses Australia's largest and finest collection of locomotive engines and rolling stock. The 100 or so items on display include some 30 engines. Among the most impressive trains are the gigantic "Mountain" class engines, and "Tea and Sugar" trains that once ran between railway camps in remote parts of the desert. Entrance includes a train ride. Allow 1½ hours.

Lipton St., North Adelaide. ✆ **08/8341 1690.** Admission A$9 (US$7.20) adults, A$3.50 (US$2.80) children, A$20 (US$16) families. Daily 10am–5pm. Bus: 151 or 153 from North Terrace, opposite Parliament House, to stop 40 (approx. 30 min.).

## ORGANIZED TOURS

**Gray Line Day Tours** (✆ **1300/858 687** in Australia, or 03/9663 4455; www.grayline.com) operates a city sightseeing tour for A$39 (US$31) for adults and A$20 (US$16) for children. It operates Monday through Saturday from 9:30am to noon. The bus can pick you up at your hotel. Other Gray Line tours take in central Adelaide, with either Hahndorf or Cleland Wildlife Park included; the Flinders Ranges; and Kangaroo Island.

## ENJOYING THE GREAT OUTDOORS

**BIKING** Adelaide's parks and riverbanks are very popular with cyclists. Rent your bicycle from **Linear Park Bikes,** Elder Park, King William Road (✆ **08/8223-6271**). The rate is A$15 to A$20 (US$12–US$16) for 24 hours, including helmet, lock, and baby seat (if needed). **Recreation SA** (✆ **08/8226 7301**) publishes a brochure showing Adelaide's bike routes. Pick one up at the **South Australian Visitor & Travel Centre** (see "Visitor Information," earlier in this chapter). **The Map Shop,** 6 Peel St. (✆ **08/8231 2033**), is also a good source for maps.

**HIKING & JOGGING** The banks of the River Torrens are a good place for a jog. The fit and adventurous might want to tackle the **Heysen Trail,** a 1,600km (992-mile) walk through bush, farmland, and rugged hill country that starts 80km (50 miles) south of Adelaide and goes to the Flinders Ranges by way of the Adelaide Hills and the Barossa Valley. For more information on the trail, visit the **South Australian Visitor & Travel Centre** (see "Visitor Information," earlier in this chapter).

**GOLF** The **City of Adelaide Golf Course** (✆ **08/8267 2171**) is close to town and has two short 18-hole courses and a full-size championship course. Greens fees are A$14 to A$19 (US$11–US$15) weekdays and A$18 to A$22 (US$14–US$18) weekends, depending on the course. Club rental is available. Ask about cheaper prices after 4pm.

## SPECTATOR SPORTS

**CRICKET** The **Adelaide Oval** (✆ **08/8300 3800**), on the corner of War Memorial Drive and King William Street, is the venue for international matches during the summer season. The Institute Building, part of the State Library of SA, displays the **Don Bradman Collection** ✆ **08/8207 7595,** an exhibit of cricket memorabilia.

**FOOTBALL** Unlike New South Wales, where Rugby League is the most popular winter sport, in Adelaide you'll find plenty of Australian Rules fanatics. Games are usually played on Saturday at the **Adelaide Oval** (see above) or at **Football Park** (✆ **08/8268 2088**), Turner Drive, West Lakes. The home teams are the Adelaide Crows and the Port Adelaide Power. Games are played February through October, with the finals in September and October. Tickets must be purchased well in advance from **BASS** (✆ **13 12 46** in South Australia, or 08/8400 2205).

## THE SHOPPING SCENE

**Rundle Mall** (between King William and Pulteney sts.) is Adelaide's main shopping street. This pedestrian-only thoroughfare is home to the big names in fashion.

**Adelaide's Central Market** (✆ **08/8203 7494;** www.adelaidecitycouncil.com/CentralMarket), behind the Adelaide Hilton Hotel between Gouger and Grote streets, has the largest produce market in the Southern Hemisphere. It's a good place to shop for vegetables, fruit, meat, fish, and the like, although it's worth popping into even if you're not looking for picnic fixings. The market, in a warehouselike structure, is open Tuesday from 7am to 5:30pm, Thursday from 9am to 5:30pm, Friday from 7am to 9pm, and Saturday from 7am to 3pm.

The six-story **Myer Centre,** next door to the Myer department store, 22–38 Rundle Mall, has a Body Shop (on the ground floor), for beauty products; an Australian Geographic shop (on level 3), for top-quality Australiana; and Exotica (level 2), where you can find unusual futuristic gifts.

Just off Rundle Mall, at Shop no. 6 in the City Cross Arcade, is **L'Unique** (✆ **08/8231 0030**), a good crafts shop selling South Australian pottery, jewelry, woodcraft, hand-blown glass, and original paintings.

Elsewhere, the **Jam Factory Craft and Design Centre,** in the Lions Art Centre, 19 Morphett St. (✆ **08/8410 0727**), sells an excellent range of locally made ceramics, glass, furniture, and metal items. You can also watch the craftspeople at work here.

Head to the **R.M. Williams** shop on Gawler Place (✆ **08/8232 3611**) for the best simple boots you're likely to find, as well as other Aussie fashion icons, including Akubra hats, moleskin pants, and Driza-bone coats.

### *Finds* Shopping for Opals

South Australia is home to the world's largest sources of white opals. (The more expensive black opals generally come from Lightning Ridge in New South Wales.) There are plenty of places to buy around town, but **Opal Field Gems,** 33 King William St. (✆ **08/8212 5300**), is one of the best. As a rule, you're not going to find any bargains, so just buy what you like (and can afford—good opals cost many thousands of dollars).

## ADELAIDE AFTER DARK

The ***Adelaide Advertiser*** lists all performances and exhibitions in its entertainment pages. The free tourist guide ***Today in Adelaide,*** available in most hotels, also has information. Tickets for theater and other entertainment events in Adelaide can be purchased from **BASS** (✆ **13 12 46** in South Australia, or 08/8400 2205) **ticket outlets** at the following locations: Festival Theatre, Adelaide Festival Centre, King William Road; Centre Pharmacy, 19 Central Market Arcade; Verandah Music, 182 Rundle St.; and on the fifth floor of the Myer department store, Rundle Mall.

### THE PERFORMING ARTS

The major concert hall is the **Adelaide Festival Centre,** King William Road (✆ **08/8216 8600** for general inquiries, or 08/8400 2205 for box office). The Festival Centre encompasses three auditoriums: the 1,978-seat Festival Theatre, the 612-seat Playhouse, and the 350-seat Space Centre. This is the place in Adelaide to see opera, ballet, drama, orchestral concerts, the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra, plays, and experimental drama.

The complex also includes an outdoor amphitheater used for jazz, rock'n'roll, and country-music concerts; an art gallery; a bistro; a piano bar; and the Silver Jubilee Organ, the world's largest transportable concert-hall organ (built in Austria to commemorate Queen Elizabeth II's Silver Jubilee).

The Adelaide Repertory Festival presents five productions a year, ranging from drama to comedy, at the **Arts Theatre,** 53 Angas St. (✆ **08/8221 5644**). Playwrights Alan Ayckbourne and Terrence Rattigan are among the many who have had plays performed here. The theater, which is a short walk from many hotels and restaurants, is also the home of the Metropolitan Musical Theatre Company, which presents two musical comedy productions a year. Tickets cost around A$16 (US$13) for adults and A$11 (US$8.80) for children.

**Her Majesty's Theatre,** 58 Grote St. (✆ **08/8216 8600**), is a 1,000-seat venue opposite the Adelaide Central Market that presents drama, comedy, musicals, dance, opera, and recitals. Tickets generally cost A$30 to A$55 (US$24–US$44).

### THE BAR & CLUB SCENE

Adelaide's nightlife ranges from twiddling your thumbs to nude lap dancers. For adult entertainment (clubs with the word *strip* in the name) head to **Hindley Street**—there are a few pubs there, but I wouldn't recommend them. For information on gay and lesbian options, pick up the ***Adelaide Gay Times.***

The popular **Universal Wine Bar,** 285 Rundle St. (✆ 08/8232 5000), is the perfect place to start an evening, with great atmosphere and good wines by the glass.

Most pubs are open from 11am to midnight. For all-age pubs, locals will point you toward **The Austral,** 205 Rundle St. (✆ 08/8223 4660), which has bands and DJs on weekends; **The Exeter,** 246 Rundle St. (✆ 08/8223 2623), which sports a beer garden and frequent bands; and the **British Hotel,** 58 Finniss St. (✆ 08/8267 2188), in North Adelaide, where you can cook your own steak on the courtyard barbecue. Also popular with visitors and locals alike are the **Earl of Aberdeen,** 316 Pulteney St., at Carrington Street (✆ 08/8223 6433), a colonial-style pub popular for after-work drinks; the **Crown & Sceptre Hotel,** 308 King William St. (✆ 08/8212 4159), with a beer garden and bands; and the **Belgium Beer Café,** 27–29 Ebenezer Place (✆ 08/8359 2233), good for mussels, french fries with mayonnaise, and great though pricy

Belgian beer. **The Port Dock Brewery Hotel,** 10 Todd St., Port Adelaide (✆ 08/8240 0187), was licensed as a pub in 1864; it brews five of its own beers and pumps them directly to its bars with old English beer engines.

The city's largest nightclub is **Heaven Nightclub,** 1 West Terrace (✆ **08/8216 5200**), which has several dance floors and chill-out rooms. Expect heavy dance music. Another popular venue is **The Cargo Club,** 213 Hindley St. (✆ **08/8231 2327**).

### TRYING YOUR LUCK AT THE CASINO

Right next to the Adelaide Hyatt, and dwarfed by the old railway station containing it, is the **Adelaide Casino** (now officially called "Skycity" to make it sound trendier), North Terrace (✆ **1800/888 711** in Australia, or 08/8212 2811). The casino has two floors of gaming tables and slot machines, as well as four bars and several dining options, including a fast-food station and the excellent Pullman buffet restaurant. The casino is open Sunday through Thursday from 10am to 4am and Friday and Saturday from 10am to 6am.

## 2 Side Trips from Adelaide

### THE BAROSSA: ON THE TRAIL OF THE GRAPE

More than a quarter of Australia's wines and a disproportionate number of top labels originate in the Barossa and Eden valleys—collectively known as the **Barossa.** Beginning just 45km (28 miles) northeast of Adelaide and easily accessible, the area has had an enormous influence on the city's culture. In fact, Adelaidians of all socioeconomic levels partake in more wine talk than the French. German settlers from Silesia, who came to escape religious persecution, first settled the area. They brought their culture, their food, and their vines. They built the Lutheran churches that dominate the Barossa's skyline. With the help of English aristocrats, the wine industry went from strength to strength. Today, there are over 50 wineries in an area that retains its German flavor.

The focal points of the area are **Angaston,** farthest from Adelaide; **Nuriootpa,** the center of the rural services industry; and **Tanunda,** the nearest town to the city. Each has interesting architecture, crafts and antiques shops, and specialty food outlets. If you are adventurous, you might want to rent a bike in Adelaide, take it on the train to **Gawler,** and cycle through the Barossa. Other options are exploring the area by hot-air balloon, motorcycle, or limousine.

### ESSENTIALS

**WHEN TO GO** The best times to visit the Barossa is in spring (Sept–Oct), when it's not too hot and there are plenty of flowering trees and shrubs, and in fall (Apr–May), when the leaves turn red. The main wine harvest is in late summer and early autumn (Feb–Apr). The least crowded time is winter (June–Aug). Hotel prices can be more expensive on the weekend.

**GETTING THERE** If you have a car (by far the most flexible way to visit the Barossa), I recommend taking the scenic route from Adelaide. (The route doesn't have a specific name, but it's obvious on a map.) It takes about half an hour longer than the Main North Road through Gawler, but the trip is well worth it. Follow signs to Birdwood, Springton, Mount Pleasant, and Angaston.

Public buses run infrequently to the major centers from Adelaide. There are no buses between wineries.

### Tips So Much Wine, So Little Time

If you have the choice of exploring the Barossa or the Hunter Valley in New South Wales (see chapter 5), I recommend the **Barossa,** which despite being a little more touristy has more to offer in history and architecture.

Another famous wine-producing region is the **Coonawarra,** 381km (236 miles) southeast of Adelaide near the border with Victoria; it's particularly convenient if you're driving from Melbourne. The area is only 12km (7½ miles) long and 2km (just over 1 mile) wide, but the scenic countryside is crammed with historical villages and 16 wineries. The **Clare Valley,** 135km (84 miles) north of Adelaide, is another pretty area; it produces some outstanding examples of cool-climate wine. Finally, the **McLaren Vale,** south of Adelaide, is home to some 42 wineries producing some of Australia's best aromatic white wines as well as shiraz.

**ORGANIZED TOURS FROM ADELAIDE** Various companies run limited sightseeing tours. **Adelaide Sightseeing** (✆ **08/8231 4144;** www.adelaidesightseeing.com.au) offers a day trip from Adelaide, stopping off at three wineries. It costs A$90 (US$72) for adults and A$45 (US$36) for children, including lunch. **Mirror Image Touring Company** (✆ **08/8362 1400;** www.mirror-image.com.au) offers several 1-day tours in a vehicle that holds a maximum of six passengers for a cost of A$199 (US$159) per person. Another option is the **Barossa Wine Train** (✆ **08/8212 7888**), which departs from Adelaide Railway Station on Thursday, Saturday, and Sunday. A variety of day and overnight tours are available.

**VISITOR INFORMATION** The **Barossa Wine and Visitor Information Centre,** 66–68 Murray St., Tanunda, SA 5352 (✆ **08/8563 0600;** www.barossa-region.org), is open Monday through Friday from 9am to 5pm, and Saturday and Sunday from 10am to 4pm. It's worth popping into the center's small audiovisual display for an introduction to the world of wine; admission is A$2.75 (US$2.20) for adults, free for children. You'll need an hour or so to look around.

Wines are often cheaper at the **Tanunda Cellars** bottle shop, or retail outlet, at 14 Murray St., Tanunda (✆ **08/8563 3544;** tanundacellars@dove.com.au), than at the winery door. The historic 1858 stone shop also houses one of Australia's finest collections of vintage wines.

## ACCOMMODATIONS YOU CAN AFFORD

There are plenty of standard motels and lots of interesting B&Bs throughout the Barossa, some with rooms for as little as A$60 (US$48). The Barossa Valley Farmhouse YHA, Sandy Creek Conservation Park, Sandy Creek, SA 5350 (✆ **08/8414 3001;** www.yha.org.au)—a beautifully renovated farmhouse with fully self-contained kitchen and separate dining area—is another budget option (with dorm-only accommodations suitable for families). Check the website for the booking procedure and where to pick up the key.

In general, lodgings are often sold out well in advance in the Barossa, and prices are higher on weekends. The **Barossa Wine and Visitor Information Centre** (see "Visitor

Information," above) can provide information on additional accommodations choices and off-season deals.

**Barossa Country Cottages** In Lyndoch, tucked away amid shady gum trees frequented by birds, Barossa Country Cottages make for a pleasant rural interlude. They are close to the wineries. Jacaranda Cottage has two bedrooms with a queen-size bed in each, as well as a wood fire and a lounge/dining area. Geranium Cottage has a queen-size bed in one bedroom, two single beds in another, and a sofa bed in the lounge.

Gilbert Way, Lyndock (P.O. Box 291, Lyndock, SA 5351). ✆ **08/8524 4426.** www.barossacountrycottages.com. 2 cabins. A$150 (US$120) for 2 people. Extra person A$55 (US$44). Breakfast provisions included. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Spa. *In room:* A/C, TV, kitchen, hair dryer, laundry.

**Barossa Valley (SA) Tourist Park** This peaceful place is back from the road and abuts a nature lake and wildlife reserve. The cabins are simple but come with just about everything you need for a pleasant stay. Cabins have a combination of doubles, singles, and bunk beds. If you don't have your own linen, you'll pay an extra A$10 (US$8).

Penrice Rd., Nuriootpa SA 5355. ✆ **08/8562 1404.** Fax 08/85622 615. www.barossa-tourist-park.com.au. 27 cabins, 19 with bathroom. A$42 (US$34) double without bathroom; A$55–A$69 (US$44–US$55) double with bathroom; family unit A$76 (US$61). Extra adult A$7–A$10 (US$5.60–US$8), extra child 3–15 A$3 (US$2.40). AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Outdoor pool nearby; 2 tennis courts; coin-op laundry. *In room:* A/C, TV, kitchenette, coffeemaker, iron.

## WHERE TO DINE

The Barossa prides itself on its cuisine as well as its wine, so you'll find plenty of places of note to eat, many of them serving traditional German food. A hot spot for lunch or dinner is **Vintner's Bar & Grill,** Nuriootpa Road, Angaston (✆ **08/8564 2488**); the wine list is six pages long! Try bay leaf risotto with prawns or roast veal rack with crisp polenta. Main courses cost A$22 to A$27 (US$18–US$22). It's open daily for lunch and Monday through Saturday for dinner. Another choice is **Salters,** Satram Winery, Nuriootpa Road, Angaston (✆ **08/8564 3344**); local produce is the specialty, with main courses such as slow-roasted baby pork, milk-fed lamb, and crisp-based pizzas. Main courses are A$20 to A$26 (US$16–US$21). It's open daily for lunch and Wednesday to Saturday from 6pm for dinner. Perhaps the best German-style bakery in the valley is the **Lyndoch Bakery,** on the Barossa Highway, Lyndoch (✆ **08/8524 4422**). In Angaston, you must stop off at **The Seasons of the Valley,** 6 Washington St. (✆ **08/8564 3688**). The restored 1840 homestead house has cottage gardens and a sunny veranda as well as delicious meals for A$15 to A$18 (US$12–US$14). It's open daily 10am to 5pm.

## TOURING THE WINERIES

With some 50 wineries offering free cellar-door tastings, daily tours charting the wine-making process, or both, you won't be stuck for places to visit. All wineries are well signposted. Below are just a few of my favorite places, but don't be shy about stopping whenever you come across a winery that takes your fancy. ***A tip:*** Try a sparkling red. Noses may turn up elsewhere, and it takes some getting used to, but bear in mind that the world's wine industry now hangs on Australia's every offering; it may well be the great tipple of the future.

**Orlando and Jacobs Creek Visitor Centre** This large winery was established in 1847 and is the home of many award-winning brands. Its big seller is the Jacobs Creek

brand, now sold worldwide. Premium wines include the Lawson Shiraz and the Jacaranda Ridge Cabernet; new vintages of either will set you back at least A$45 (US$36) a bottle. There's a cafe and a picnic area with barbecues.

Barossa Hwy., Rowland Flat. ✆ **08/8521 3000.** Free admission. Daily 10am–5pm.

**Penfolds** Australia's biggest wine producer churns out some 23 million liters (5.8 million gal.) from this winery every year. Penfolds also owns other wineries all over the country. It all started when Dr. Christopher Rawson planted a few vines in 1844 to make wine for his patients. The winery now houses the largest oak-barrel maturation cellars in the Southern Hemisphere.

Nuriootpa. ✆ **08/8568 9408.** Free admission. Mon–Fri 10am–5pm; Sat–Sun 11am–5pm.

**Rockford** Most of the buildings here were constructed in 1984 out of recycled local materials, but you'd never know it. The wine is pressed between mid-March and the end of April, in the traditional way with machinery from the turn of the 20th century. It's a fascinating sight. Demand for Rockford wines, especially Basket Pressed Shiraz, far exceeds supply.

Krondorf Rd., Tanunda. ✆ **08/8568 9408.** Free admission. Mon–Sat 11am–5pm.

**Seppelts** This National Trust–listed property was founded in 1857 by Joseph Seppelt, an immigrant from Silesia. The wine tour around the gardens and bluestone buildings is considered one of the best in the world. On a nearby slope, check out the family's Romanesque mausoleum, skirted by planted roadside palms, built during the 1930s recession to keep winery workers employed.

Seppeltsfield. ✆ **08/8568 6200.** Admission A$8 (US$6.40) adults, A$2 (US$1.60) children 5–16. Mon–Fri 10am–5pm; Sat–Sun 11am–5pm. Tours hourly Mon–Fri 11am–3pm; Sat–Sun 11:30am, 1:30, and 2:30pm.

**Wolf Blass** This winery's Germanic-style black-label vintages have an excellent international reputation, while its cheaper yellow-label vintages are the toast of many a Sydney dinner party. The Wolf Blass museum is worth a peek.

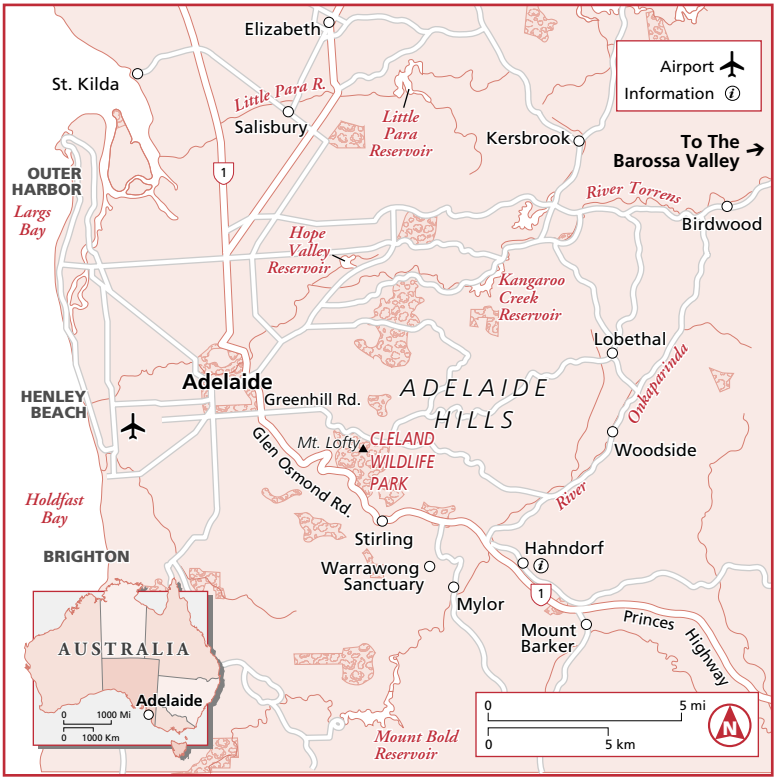
Sturt Hwy., Nuriootpa. ✆ **08/8568 7300.** Free admission. Mon–Fri 9am–5pm; Sat–Sun 10am–5pm.

**Yalumba** This winery was built in 1849, making it the oldest family-owned wine-making business in Australia. It's also huge. Keep an eye out for the sad-looking Himalayan bear in the corner of the large tasting room; following a run-in with a hunting rifle, it's been Yalumba's advertising gimmick. The winery's Signature Red Cabernet-Shiraz is among the best you'll ever taste.

Eden Valley Rd., Angaston. ✆ **08/8561 3200.** www.yalumba.com.au. Free admission. Mon–Fri 8:30am–5pm; Sat 10am–5pm; Sun noon–5pm.

## THE ADELAIDE HILLS

A 25-minute drive from Adelaide and visible even from the main shopping street, you'll find the tree-lined slopes and pretty valleys, orchards, vineyards, winding roads, and historic townships of the **Adelaide Hills.** You might want to walk part of the Heysen Trail (see "Enjoying the Great Outdoors" in the Adelaide section, earlier in this chapter), browse through the shops in Hahndorf, stop in Melba's Chocolate Factory in Woodside, or visit Cleland Wildlife Park or Warrawong Sanctuary. Otherwise, it's a nice outing just to hit the road and drive. Should you decide to stay overnight, the area offers lots of cozy B&Bs.




## ESSENTIALS

**GETTING THERE** The Adelaide Hills are 25 minutes from Adelaide by car on Greenhill and Glen Osmond roads. **Adelaide Sightseeing** (✆ **08/8231 4144;** www.adelaidesightseeing.com.au) runs outings to the gorgeous town of Hahndorf (see below). An afternoon excursion to Hahndorf costs A$49 (US$39) for adults and A$23 (US$18) for children 1 to 14. The company also offers trips to Kangaroo Island, costing A$181 (US$145) for adults and A$116 (US$93) for kids; the Flinders ranges, costing A$248 (US$198) for adults and A$261 (US$209) for kids; the Coorong, costing A$95 (US$76) for adults and A$50 (US$40) for kids; and the Great Ocean Road, costing A$235 (US$188) for adults and A$165 (US$132) for kids.

**VISITOR INFORMATION** Visitor information and bookings are available through the **Adelaide Hills Tourist Information Centre,** 41 Main St., Hahndorf (✆ **08/8388 1185**). It's open Monday through Friday from 9am to 4pm. Maps are also available at the **South Australian Visitor & Travel Centre** in Adelaide.

## WOODSIDE: CHOCOLATE LOVERS UNITE!

Visitors come here for **Melba's Chocolate Factory,** Henry Street (✆ **08/8389 7868**), where chocoholics will find a huge range of handmade chocolates. Melba's is part of

Heritage Park, a complex that includes a wood turner, a cheese maker, a ceramics studio, a leather maker, and a crafts shop. It's open Monday through Friday from 10am to 4pm, and Saturday, Sunday, and holidays from noon to 5pm.

## MYLOR: GETTING BACK TO NATURE

**Mylor** is 25km (16 miles) southeast of Adelaide and 10km (6 miles) south of Mount Lofty via the town of Crafters. Here you'll find the **Warrawong Sanctuary,** Stock Road, Mylor (P.O. Box 1135), Stirling, SA 5152 (✆ **08/8370 9197;** fax 08/8370 8332; www.warrawong.com). Unlike the inhabitants of many other wildlife parks, the animals here are not kept in enclosed runs. Instead, park founder Dr. John Wamsley took a 14-hectare (35-acre) tract of farmland, replanted it with natural bush, fenced it off, and went around shooting the introduced rabbits, cats, dogs, and foxes that plague much of Australia. Then the doctor reintroduced native animals such as kangaroos, various types of wallabies, bandicoots, *beetongs,* platypuses, possums, frogs, birds, and reptiles. They are all thriving, not only because he eliminated their unnatural predators but also because he re-created waterways, rainforests, and blackwater ponds. The animals roam free while you're guided through on a 1½-hour dawn or sunset walk (A$18/US$14 adults, A$12/US$9.60 children). There's a restaurant on the premises, and you can even stay overnight in large cabins with bathrooms, wall-to-wall carpeting, and air-conditioning. The cabins cost A$125 (US$100) per person with both dawn and dusk tours, a two-course dinner, and breakfast.

Compared with Cleland Wildlife Park (see below), the Warrawong Sanctuary has fewer varieties of animals—you won't find any koalas, for example—but it's more educational and you get the feeling that you're in the wild rather than in a zoo.

## HAHNDORF: GERMAN HERITAGE, CRAFTS & MORE ★

This historic German-style village is one of South Australia's most popular tourist destinations. Lutherans fleeing religious persecution in eastern Prussia founded the town, which is 29km (18 miles) southeast of Adelaide, in 1839. They brought their wine-making skills, foods, and architectural inheritance, and put it all together here. Hahndorf still resembles a small German town in appearance and atmosphere, and is included on the World Heritage List as a Historical German Settlement. Walking around, you'll see **St. Paul's Lutheran Church,** erected in 1890. **The Wool Factory, L'Unique Fine Arts & Craft,** and **Bamfurlong Fine Crafts** are worth checking out and are within walking distance of Main Street.

### ACCOMMODATIONS YOU CAN AFFORD

**The Hahndorf Resort** ★ This large resort has a variety of accommodations as well as approximately 80 trailer and tent sites. Lodgings include air-conditioned cabins, and motel-style rooms with queen-size beds (some have an extra single) and a shower. The chalets look as if they're straight out of Bavaria; each can accommodate two to five people in one or two bedrooms. Each has a full kitchen and an attached bathroom with shower. Some of them overlook a small lake. The larger spa chalets come with Jacuzzis. An on-site animal sanctuary has a few emus, kangaroos, and horses.

145A Main St., Hahndorf, SA 5245. ✆ **08/8388 7921.** Fax 08/8388 7282. www.hahndorfresort.com.au. 60 units. A$68 (US$54) cabin; A$99 (US$79) motel room; A$125–A$159 (US$100–US$127) chalet. A$12 (US$9.60) extra adult, A$5.50 (US$4.40) extra child. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; heated outdoor pool; 2 putting greens; half-size tennis court; small gym; bike rental; limited room service; coin-op laundry. *In room:* A/C, TV, kitchen (in chalets), microwave, coffeemaker, iron.

### WHERE TO DINE

If you want a treat, head to the **Bridgewater Mill,** Mt. Barker Road, Bridgewater (✆ **08/8339 3422**). In an impressive 1860s stone building with a terrace near a waterwheel, this place serves some of the best-regarded food in the country. Try duck with braised cherries. Main courses cost A$31 (US$25); a three-course menu, served Sunday only, is A$68 (US$54). It's open for lunch Thursday to Monday noon to 2:30pm and accepts American Express, MasterCard, and Visa.

## OAKBANK: A DAY AT THE RACES

The **Easter Oakbank Racing Carnival** is part of the Australia-wide "picnic races" that take place in small towns throughout the nation. The Oakbank horse races attract crowds in excess of 110,000 a day over the long Easter weekend (and smaller crowds at other times). General admission is A$10 (US$8), plus another A$5 (US$4) for admission to the grandstand. The **Oakbank Racing Club** (✆ **08/8212 6279**) is just off the main road; you can't miss it.

## MT. LOFTY: VIEWS & 'ROOS

Visitors make the pilgrimage to the top of 690m (2,263-ft.) **Mt. Lofty,** 16km (10 miles) southeast of Adelaide, for the panoramic views over Adelaide, the Adelaide plains, and the Mt. Lofty Ranges. There are several nice bushwalks from the top.

Almost at the top of Mt. Lofty, off Summit Road, is the **Cleland Wildlife Park** (✆ **08/8339 2444**). Here you'll find all the usual Australian animals, including the largest male red kangaroo I've ever seen. Though the park is not as good as similar wildlife parks elsewhere in Australia, it does have a very good wetlands aviary. One of the drawbacks of Cleland is that it has some unimaginative enclosures, notably the one for the Tasmanian devils. The park is open daily from 9:30am to 4:30pm. Visitors can meet at the Tasmanian devil enclosure at 2pm and join the animal feed run by following a tractor around the park as it drops off food.

Admission to Cleland is A$13 (US$10) for adults, A$8 (US$6.40) for children 3 to 14, and A$35 (US$28) for families. Koala holding is allowed during photo sessions daily from 2 to 4pm (but not on very hot summer days); on Sunday and public holidays there's an additional session from 10am to noon. The privilege will cost you A$12 (US$9.60) per photo. A kiosk and restaurant are on the premises.

Public transport to either place is a bit of a hassle. To get to the Mt. Lofty Lookout, take bus no. 163 Monday through Friday, or no. 165 Saturday and Sunday, from Currie Street in the city. Ask the driver to drop you off at Crafters. The trip takes 30 minutes. From there you'll need to take a short taxi ride to the top; prearrange pickup with **Tony's** (✆ **08/8388 5988**).

To get to Cleland, take bus no. 822 from Currie Street to stop 19b. There are only two runs Monday through Friday at 10am and noon. Take the 10am bus and ask the bus driver for the exact return time. The trip to Cleland takes 40 minutes.

### WHERE TO DINE

While you're atop Mt. Lofty, have lunch at **The Summit** restaurant (✆ **08/8339 2600**). Look out for the kangaroo filet with chile, lemon grass, and coconut sauce, and venison on rosemary polenta. Main courses cost A$22 to A$26 (US$18–US$21). It's open Monday and Tuesday 9am to 5pm, and Wednesday to Sunday 9am to 10:30pm (Wed to 5pm in winter), and accepts American Express, Diners Club, MasterCard, and Visa. The **Summit Café** here also sells good sandwiches and cakes, and Devonshire tea for A$8 (US$6.40).

## 3 Kangaroo Island ★★★

110km (68 miles) S of Adelaide

There is nowhere better than Kangaroo Island to see Australian marsupials in the wild. Spend a few days with the right guide and you can walk along a beach past a colony of sea lions; spot hundreds of New Zealand fur seals; creep through the bush on the trail of wallabies or kangaroos; spot sea eagles, black swans, sacred ibis, pelicans, little penguins, the rare glossy black cockatoo, and other birds; come across goannas; pick out bunches of koalas hanging in the trees above your head; and, if you're lucky, see platypuses, echidnas, bandicoots, and reclusive pygmy possums—the list goes on.

The secrets to Kangaroo Island's success are its perfect conditions, the most important of which is the fact that there are no introduced foxes or rabbits to prey on the native inhabitants or their environment. The island was also never colonized by the dingo—Australia's "native" dog—which is believed to have been introduced from Asia some 4,000 years ago. About one-third of the island is unspoiled national park, and there are plenty of wildlife corridors to give the animals a chance to move about the island, lessening the problems of inbreeding.

While the animals are what most people come to see, no one goes away without being impressed by the scenery. Kangaroo Island has low mallee scrubland, dense eucalyptus forests, rugged coastal scenery, beaches, caves, lagoons, and blackwater swamps. The effect of 150 years of European colonization has taken its toll, though. In South Australia as a whole, some 27 mammal, 5 bird, 1 reptile, and 30 plant species have become extinct since Matthew Flinders discovered the state in 1802.

The island's history is a harsh one. Aborigines inhabited the island as early as 10,000 years ago but abandoned it for unexplained reasons. In the 19th century, pirates; mutineers; deserters from English, French, and American ships; and escaped convicts from the eastern colonies settled here. Sealers also arrived and devastated the seal and sea lion population—in just 1 year, from 1803 to 1804, they killed more than 20,000 animals. Between 1802 and 1836, Aboriginal women from both the mainland and Tasmania were kidnapped, brought to Kangaroo Island, and forced to work catching and skinning seals, kangaroos, and wallabies, and lugging salt from the salt mines.

In 1836, Kangaroo Island became the first place in South Australia to be officially settled. The state's capital was Kingscote (which was abandoned a couple of years later in favor of Adelaide). In spite of its early settlement, Kangaroo Island had very few residents until after World War II, when returned soldiers set up farms here. Today, more than a million sheep are raised on the island. The island also acts as an official bee sanctuary to protect the genetic purity of the Ligurian bee, introduced in 1881, and it is believed to be the only place in the world where this strain of bee survives.

### ISLAND ESSENTIALS

**WHEN TO GO** The best time to visit Kangaroo Island is between November and March (though you'll have difficulty finding accommodations over the Christmas school holiday period). July and August tend to be rainy, and winter can be cold (though often milder than on the mainland around Adelaide). Many companies offer 1-day trips to Kangaroo Island from Adelaide, but I would advise you to tailor your holiday to spend at least 2 days here. Three or even 5 days would be better. There really is a lot to see, and you won't regret spending the extra time.

**GETTING THERE** **Emu Airways** (✆ **08/8234 3711**), with up to six daily departures, and **Regional Express** (✆ **13 17 13** in Australia, or 02/6393 5550; www.regionalexpress.com.au) serve Kangaroo Island from Adelaide. Flights leave from the General Aviation Terminal, Kel Barclay Avenue, Adelaide. The General Aviation Terminal is a 20-minute walk (or shorter taxi ride!) from the main airport terminal. The flight from Adelaide to Kangaroo Island usually takes about 25 minutes.

If you prefer to go by sea, **Kangaroo Island SeaLink** (✆ **13 13 01** in Australia, or 08/8202 8688; www.sealink.com.au) operates two vehicle and passenger ferries four times daily (up to 10 times in peak periods) from Cape Jervis on the tip of the Fleurieu Peninsula on the mainland to Penneshaw on Kangaroo Island. The trip takes 40 minutes and costs A$64 (US$51) round-trip for adults, A$32 (US$26) for children 3 to 14, and A$138 (US$110) for cars. Connecting bus service from Adelaide to Cape Jervis costs an extra A$36 (US$29) for adults, and A$18 (US$14) for children round-trip. Off-peak prices may be cheaper; check when booking. Count on 3 hours for the trip from Adelaide if you take the connecting bus. Advance bookings are essential.

SeaLink also runs a range of island tours, including the 2-day, 1-night "K.I. coast to coast," which costs from A$289 (US$231) per person sharing a double room. SeaLink also offers a wide range of accommodations, day tours, and adventure activities and offers Adelaide hotel pickups for selected tours.

**VISITOR INFORMATION** **Tourism Kangaroo Island,** Gateway Information Centre, Howard Drive (P.O. Box 336), Penneshaw, Kangaroo Island, SA 5222 (✆ **08/8553 1185;** fax 08/8553 1255; www.tourkangarooisland.com.au), has plenty of maps and information and can assist visitors with accommodations and tour information. For more information on the island's national parks, contact **National Parks and Wildlife South Australia,** known as NP&WSA, 39 Dauncey St. (P.O. Box 39), Kingscote, SA 5223 (✆ **08/8553 2381;** fax 08/8553 2531), open Monday through Friday from 9am to 5pm.

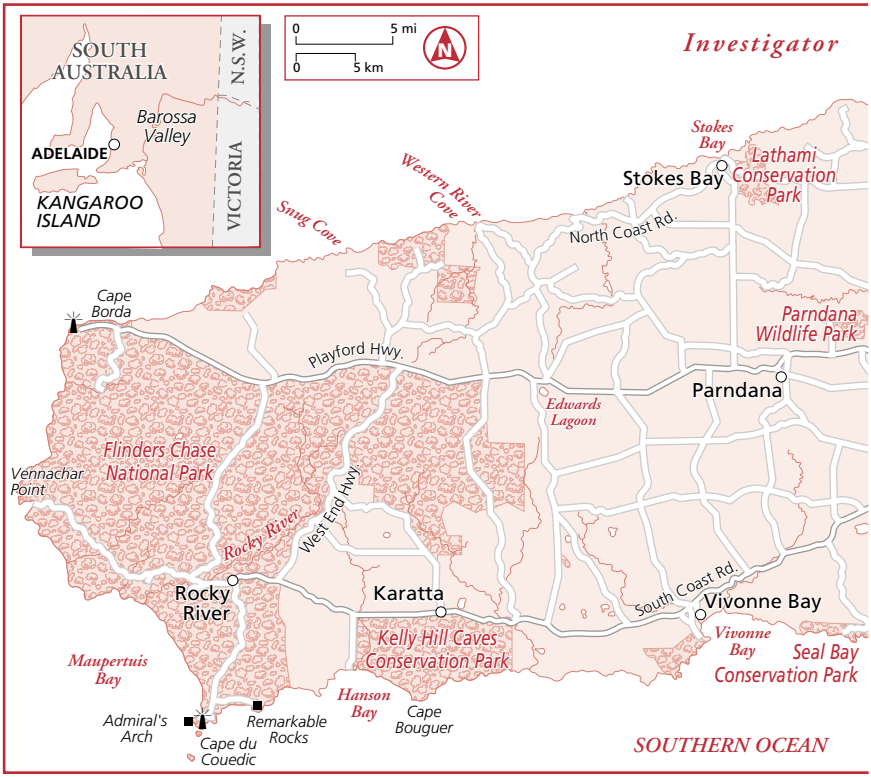
In addition, hotel and motel staff members generally can provide tourist brochures and sightseeing advice.

**ISLAND LAYOUT** Kangaroo Island is Australia's third-largest island, 156km (97 miles) long and 57km (35 miles) wide at its widest point. The distance across the narrowest point is only 2km (1¼ miles). Approximately 3,900 people live on the island. More than half live on the northeast coast in the three main towns: Kingscote (pop. 1,800), Penneshaw (pop. 250), and American River (pop. 200). The island's major attractions are farther from the mainland: Flinders Chase National Park is in the far

### *Value* An Island Bargain

I'd advise buying an **NP&WSA Island Pass** if you'll be exploring the island on your own for 3 days or more and visiting the national park and attractions more than once. It costs A$42 (US$34) for adults, A$30 (US$24) for children, and A$110 (US$88) for families, and includes guided tours of Seal Bay, Kelly Hill Caves, Cape Borda, and Cape Willoughby. The pass also includes access to Flinders Chase National Park. The pass doesn't cover penguin tours or camping fees. It's available at the Tourism Kangaroo Island in Penneshaw and at the national parks office in Kingscote (see "Visitor Information," above).

# Kangaroo Island

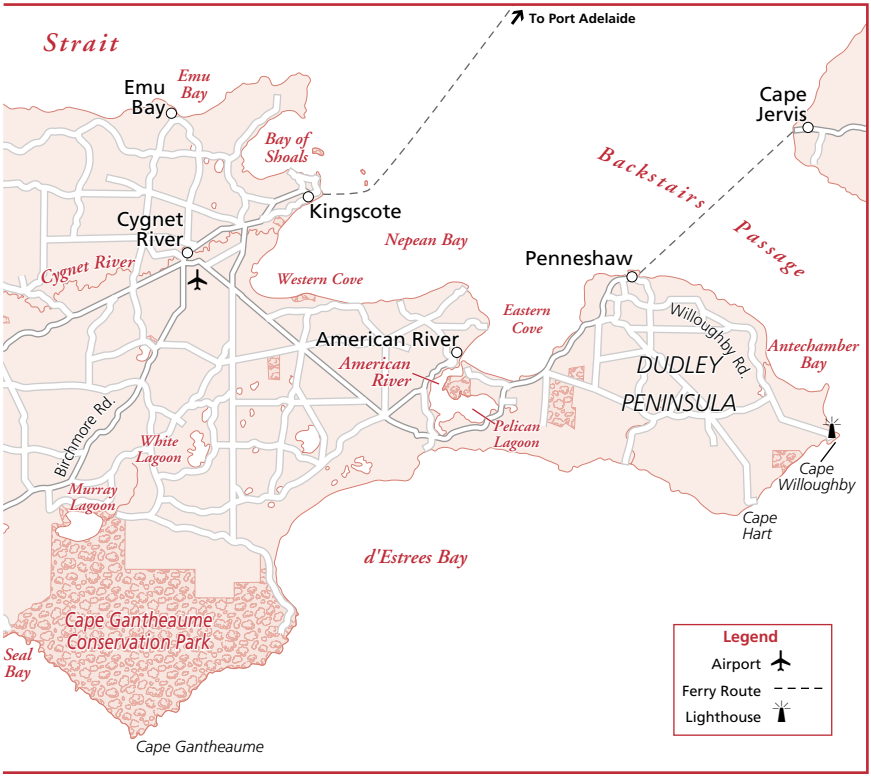



west, Lathami Conservation Park is on the north coast, and Seal Bay and Kelly's Caves are on the south coast.

**GETTING AROUND** Apart from twice-daily SeaLink bus service, which connects Kingscote, Penneshaw, and American River, there is no public transport on the island. **Airport Shuttle Service** (✆ **1800/750 850** in Australia) meets all flights to Kangaroo Island and will take passengers to Kingscote, Emu Bay, and American River. The one-way trip to Kingscote costs A$10 (US$8) for adults and A$5 (US$4) for children; to Emu Bay A$17 (US$14) for adults and A$8 (US$6.40) for children; to American River A$33 (US$26) for adults and A$15 (US$12) for children. Book the return trip from your accommodations to the airport in advance.

Major roads between Penneshaw, American River, Kingscote, and Parndana are paved, as are the road to Seal Bay and all major roads within Flinders Chase National Park. Most other roads are made of gravel and can be very slippery if the driver approaches corners too quickly. All roads are accessible by two-wheel-drive vehicles; if you're in a rental car from the mainland, make sure your policy allows you to drive on Kangaroo Island. Avoid driving at night—animals rarely fare best in a car collision.

Car-rental agencies on the island include **Budget** (✆ **08/8553 3133** or 08/8553 1034; fax 08/8553 2888), **Hertz & Kangaroo Island Rental Cars** (✆ **1800/088 296** in Australia, or 08/8553 2390; fax 08/8553 2878), and **Wheels over Kangaroo**




**Island** (✆ **1800/750 850** in Australia, or 08/8553 3030; woki@ozemail.com.au). You can pick up cars at the airport or ferry terminals.

**ORGANIZED TOURS** If you want to keep expenses down, you can't go wrong with one of the tours organized by Kangaroo Island Ferry Connections (✆ **08/8553 1233;** www.ki-ferryconnections.com). The most popular includes afternoon pickup from the main bus station in Adelaide, coach and ferry to the island, a penguin tour that evening, and dorm accommodations (you can pay a little extra to upgrade to a double room, or for more expensive hotels). The next day involves 10 hours of touring, taking in most of the main attractions. That evening you return to Adelaide. The tour costs A$220 (US$176).

If you make your own way to the island, you can join a day tour, departing Penneshaw or American River Thursday, Saturday, Sunday, Monday, and Wednesday, also stopping off at many of the main attractions. The tour costs A$99 (US$79) for adults and A$74 (US$59) for children 3 to 14. Other tours are available.

Pricier options include **Kangaroo Island Wilderness Tours** (✆ **08/8559 5033;** www.wildernesstours.com.au), which operates from the island with several small four-wheel-drive vehicles (maximum six people per vehicle). Three different 1-day trips cost A$270 to A$290 (US$216–US$232) per person, including transfers, an excellent lunch with wine, and park admission fees. Two-, 3-, and 4-day trips, including all

meals and accommodations, cost A$710 (US$568), A$1,150 (US$920), and A$1,590 (US$1,272) per person, respectively.

Another excellent operator based on the island is **Adventure Charters of Kangaroo Island,** Playford Highway, Cygnet River, SA 5223 (✆ **08/8553 9119;** www.adventurecharters.com.au), with the knowledgeable and gregarious Craig Wickham at the helm. Day trips cost A$272 (US$218) a day with a big lunch, or A$501 (US$401) for a 1-day safari including flights from and to Adelaide.

Another option is **Wayward Bus** (✆ **08/8410 8833;** www.waywardbus.com.au) from Adelaide. Two-day trips depart Monday, Wednesday, and Saturday and cost A$365 (US$292) per person in hostel accommodations (you can pay extra for an upgrade).

## ACCOMMODATIONS YOU CAN AFFORD

The island has a wide variety of places to choose from, from B&Bs to campgrounds. If you feel like sleeping in one of 40 cottages or coastal lodgings, contact **Kangaroo Island Remote and Coastal Farm Accommodation** (✆ **08/8553 1233;** fax 08/8553 1190; www.ki-ferryconnections.com). Prices range from A$65 to A$100 (US$52–US$80). The staff can also arrange lodgings in local farms, homes, and B&Bs for A$60 to A$110 (US$48–US$88) for a double with breakfast.

The NP&WSA (see "Visitor Information," above) also rents basic but comfortable lodgings, including relatively isolated **lighthouse cottages** ★★ at Cape Willoughby, Cape Borda, and Cape du Couedic. The price is A$21 to A$37 (US$17–US$30) per adult per night, and the minimum charge per stay is A$49 to A$110 (US$39–US$88) per cottage.

If you're on a super-tight budget, head to the **Penneshaw Youth Hostel,** 43 North Terrace, Penneshaw, Kangaroo Island, SA 5222 (✆ **08/8553 1344;** fax 08/8553 1278; www.yha.org.au), with dorm beds for A$23 (US$18) and doubles/family rooms for A$90 (US$72). It costs a few dollars less for YHA members. The YHA also arranges tours.

Camping is allowed at designated sites around the island and in national parks for a minimal fee. There are many beach, river, and bush camping spots, including the Rocky River site in the Flinders Chase National Park.

### IN KINGSCOTE

**Wisteria Lodge** ★ All rooms at the modern and definitely unglamorous-looking Wisteria Lodge are standard motel-type accommodations, with exposed brick walls and gray carpets. They have views over Nepean Bay. Deluxe rooms offer a Jacuzzi and queen-size beds. Packages include transport to the island, transfers, meals, and day tours. Reservations are essential for the restaurant.

7 Cygnet Rd., Kingscote, SA 5223. ✆ **08/8553 2707,** 800/624-3524 in the U.S. and Canada, 0800/892 407 in the U.K., 0800/803 524 in New Zealand, or 13 24 00 in Australia for reservations. Fax 08/8553 2200. www.wisterialodgeki.com. 20 units. A$150 (US$120) double; A$180 (US$144) double Jacuzzi room. Extra adult A$20–A$22 (US$16–US$18), extra child 3–12 A$15–A$19 (US$12–US$15). Ask about packages. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; heated outdoor pool; half-size tennis court; Jacuzzi; children's center; tour desk; car-rental desk; business center; limited room service; laundry service; dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer.

### IN AMERICAN RIVER

Popular with fishermen, American River is 37km (23 miles) from Kingscote. It lacks a beach but offers black swans on Pelican Lagoon. Wild wallabies abound, and egrets, magpies, and cockatoos offer early wake-up calls.

**Casuarina Coastal Units** These simple, country-style accommodations are not flashy, but they offer a cozy budget option. Each comes with a double bed, two singles, and an attached shower. The property has a playground and fish-cleaning facilities.

9 Ryberg Rd., American River, SA 5221. ✆/fax **08/8553 7020.** www.casuarinaonki.com. 6 units. A$85 (US$68) double; A$75 (US$60) double for more than 1 night. MC, V. **Amenities:** Coin-op laundry. *In room:* TV.

**Kangaroo Island Lodge** ★ Though Kangaroo Island Lodge was built in 1801, renovations in late 1999 so overhauled the place that you would be hard pressed to find anything rustic remaining. It's a nicely appointed property with pleasant, quiet motel-style rooms, a good pool, Jacuzzi, sauna, and a restaurant and bar (entrees average A$20/US$16). Some units contain kitchens. The lodge looks over Pelican Lagoon (famous for its, well, pelicans), but it's a little too far away from it to make the water-view rooms worth the extra cost.

Scenic Rd., American River, SA 5221. ✆ **08/8553 7053.** Fax 08/8553 7030. www.kilodge.com.au. 38 units. A$165 (US$132) water-view double; A$135 (US$108) poolside double. Extra person A$24 (US$19). AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; heated outdoor pool; tennis court; Jacuzzi; sauna; game room; tour desk; car-rental desk; limited room service; coin-op laundry; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, kitchen (in some), fridge, hair dryer, iron.

## IN PARNDANA

Developed by soldier settlers after World War II, Parndana today is a rural service center 25 minutes by car from Seal Bay and Stokes Bay. It's just around the corner from Parndana Wildlife Park, which has more than 50 aviaries with collections of native and other birds, some of them rare and protected.

**The Open House** ★ The best thing about The Open House is mealtime, when guests sit around a communal table and dive into home-cooked meals. The rooms—two with queen-size beds, one with two singles, and a family room for up to four—are comfortable and homey. Each has a ceiling fan and a private bathroom with shower. The owners are friendly and offer good advice on what to do around the island.

70 Smith St., Parndana, SA 5221. ✆ **08/8559 6113.** Fax 08/8559 6088. www.theopenhouse.com.au. 4 units. A$150 (US$120) per adult with dinner and breakfast; A$115 (US$92) per adult with breakfast only; A$100 (US$80) per child under 12 with dinner and breakfast; A$70 (US$56) per child with breakfast only. MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* Hair dryer.

## ON THE SOUTHWEST COAST

**Hanson Bay Cabins** ★ *Finds* On the southwest coast of the island on the South Coast Road, this property is a row of comfortable log cabins perched above a fabulous beach. Each cabin has a large picture window facing the ocean, a full kitchen, a bathroom, two bedrooms (including a double bed and three singles in all), and a wood stove. Bring your own food and supplies from Kingscote, American River, or Penneshaw. The ocean can get wild and dramatic around here, with strong offshore winds whipping up the sand and spray. The cottages are near most of the major attractions, so they make a good base. Salmon are often caught off the beach.

Hanson Bay Company, P.O. Box 614, Kingscote, SA 5225. ✆ **08/8853 2603.** Fax 08/8853 2673. www.esl.com.au/hansonbay. 6 cabins. A$170 (US$136) double; A$132 (US$106) double for more than 1 night. Extra adult A$30 (US$24), extra child A$20 (US$16). AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Bike rental; coin-op laundry; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* Kitchen, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron (on request).

## WHERE TO DINE

Most accommodations on Kangaroo Island provide meals for guests (usually at an additional cost). In addition, most day tours around the island include lunch. You'll find a few cheap takeout booths scattered around the island at the most popular

tourist spots. For lunch, you can get sandwiches at Roger's Deli on Dauncey Street, behind the Ozone Hotel, in Kingscote.

### IN PENNESHAW

**Dolphin Rock Café** FAST FOOD Here you'll find plastic tables and chairs and budget meals. The meals, including individual pizzas, and french fries and gravy, are popular with backpackers. Also on offer are fish and chips, hamburgers, and chicken. Across the road, the fairy penguins come in at dusk.

43 North Terrace (next to the YHA). ✆ **08/8553 1284.** Main courses A$4–A$12 (US$3.20–US$9.60). AE, MC, V. Summer daily 7am–8:30pm; winter Wed–Mon 7:30am–7:30pm.

### ELSEWHERE

**Cape Willoughby Café** ★★ LOCAL PRODUCE This fabulous restaurant perches on a cliff top on the far eastern tip of the island, right next to Cape Willoughby Lighthouse (an attraction in itself) and about 30km (19 miles) from Penneshaw. One wall is all glass, and the veranda affords terrific ocean views. King George whiting is a specialty, as are desserts (the sticky date pudding is mouthwatering). Outside of lunch hours (12:30–2:30pm), the cafe serves coffee and cakes. Forty-five-minute tours of the lighthouse leave from the lighthouse office daily at 10, 11am, 12:30, and 2pm. They cost A$6 (US$4.80) for adults, A$4.50 (US$3.60) for children, and A$17 (US$14) for families.

Cape Willoughby. ✆ **08/8553 1333.** Reservations required for lunch. Main courses A$20–A$27 (US$16–US$22). MC, V. Daily 10am–4pm for coffee and cakes; 12:30–2:30pm for lunch.

## EXPLORING THE ISLAND

The island is bigger than you might think, and you can spend a fair bit of time getting from one place of interest to the next. Of the many places to see on the island, **Flinders Chase National Park** ★ is one of the most important. Your first stop should be the Flinders Chase Visitors Centre (✆ **08/8559 7235**), where you can purchase park admission, view the interpretive display, dine at the licensed cafe, purchase souvenirs, and obtain parks information. After 30 years of lobbying, reluctant politicians finally agreed to preserve this region of the island in 1919. Today, it makes up around 17% of the island and is home to true wilderness, some beautiful coastal scenery, two old lighthouses, and plenty of animals. Birders have recorded at least 243 species here. Koalas are so common that they're almost falling out of the trees. Platypuses have been seen, but you'll probably need to make a special effort and sit next to a stream in the dark for a few hours for any chance of spotting one. The Platypus Waterholes walk is a 2-hour walk that's great for all ages. It begins at the Flinders Chase Visitors Centre and has a shorter option that's suitable for wheelchairs. This walk offers the best opportunity to see the platypus. Kangaroos, wallabies, and brush-tailed possums, on the other hand, are so tame and numerous that the authorities were forced to erect a barrier around the Rocky River Campground to stop them from carrying away picnickers' sandwiches!

The most impressive coastal scenery is at **Cape du Couedic,** at the southern tip of the park. Millions of years of crashing ocean have created curious structures, like the hollowed-out limestone promontory called Admiral's Arch and the aptly named Remarkable Rocks, where you'll see huge boulders balancing on top of a massive granite dome. Admiral's Arch is home to a colony of some 4,000 New Zealand fur seals that play in the rock pools and rest on the rocks. During rough weather this place can

**Tips Don't Feed the Animals, Please**

Don't feed *any* native animals. Kangaroos and wallabies might beg, but they are lactose intolerant and can go blind or fall ill from being fed human food.

be spectacular. A paved road leads from Rocky River Park Headquarters to Admiral's Arch and Remarkable Rocks, where there are a parking lot and a loop trail.

You shouldn't miss out on the unforgettable experience of walking through a colony of Australian sea lions at Seal Bay. The **Seal Bay Conservation Park** (✆ **08/8559 4207**) was created in 1972, and some 100,000 people visit it each year. Boardwalks through the dunes to the beach reduce the impact of so many feet. The colony consists of about 500 animals, but at any one time you might see up to 100 basking with their pups. The rangers who supervise the area lead guided trips throughout the day, every 15 to 30 minutes from 9am to 4:15pm. If you come here without a coach group, you must join a tour. Tours cost A$11 (US$8.80) for adults and A$7.50 (US$6) for children.

**Lathami Conservation Park,** just east of Stokes Bay, is a wonderful place to see wallabies in the wild. Just dip under the low canopy of casuarina pines and walk silently, keeping your eyes peeled. You're almost certain to spot them. If you're fortunate, you may even come across a rare glossy cockatoo—it's big and black and feeds mainly on casuarina nuts.

Another interesting spot, especially for birders, is **Murray Lagoon,** on the northern edge of Cape Gantheaume Conservation Park. It's the largest lagoon on the island and a habitat for thousands of water birds. Contact the NP&WSA (see "Visitor Information," earlier in this chapter) for information on a ranger-guided Wetland Wade.

If you want to see little **penguins**—tiny animals that stand just 33 centimeters (13 in.) tall—forget the show at Phillip Island near Melbourne. On Kangaroo Island, you can see them in a natural environment at both Kingscote and Penneshaw. The **NP&WSA** (✆ **08/8553 2381**) conducts the tours. Call ahead to confirm times, which are subject to change. Nightly tours in Kingscote depart from the reception desk at the Ozone Seafront Hotel and cost A$7.50 (US$6) for adults, A$6 (US$4.80) for children. The Penneshaw Penguin Centre, adjacent to the beach and Lloyd Collins Reserve, has the largest penguin colony on the island. Tours depart twice per evening and cost A$6 (US$4.80) for adults, A$4.50 (US$3.60) for kids 12 and older, free for children under 12.

For fabulous, though pricey, **fishing** for everything from King George whiting, trevally, and snapper to mullet and mackerel, contact **Kangaroo Island Fishing Charters** (✆ **08/8553 1328;** www.kifishchart.com.au). Prices for a day out start at A$125 (US$100), including lunch; a half-day trip costs A$90 (US$72), and you keep what you catch. **American River Fishing Charters** (✆ **0417/869 346** mobile) also runs trips.

Finally, Kangaroo Island is renowned for its fresh food, and across the island you'll see signs beckoning to you to have a taste of cheese, honey, wine, or the like. One place worth a stop is **Clifford's Honey Farm** (✆ **08/8553 8295**), which is open daily from 9am to 5pm. The farm is the home of the protected Ligurian honeybee, found nowhere else on Earth but on the island. **Island Pure Sheep Dairy** (✆ **08/8553 9110**) is another worthwhile stop. Tours and tastings are conducted at milking time

(1–5pm). It's a great chance to sample delicious sheep's milk, yogurts, and mouth-watering *haloumi* cheese. Ask at the tourist office for directions to both.

## 4 Outback South Australia

South Australia is the driest state in Australia. This becomes quite apparent once you leave behind the parklands of Adelaide and head into the interior. The Outback is as harsh as it is beautiful. Much of it consists of stony desert, saltpans, and sand hills, roamed by kangaroos and wild goats. After spring rains, though, the area can burst alive with wildflowers.

It was always difficult to travel through these parts, and even today only four main routes traverse it. One of them, the **Birdsville Track,** is famed in Outback history as the trail along which stockmen drove their herds of cattle south from Queensland. Another, the **Strzelecki Track,** runs through sand-dune country to Innaminka and on to Coopers Creek. Both of these tracks cut through the "dog fence"—a 5,600km-long (3,472-mile) barrier designed to keep dingoes out of the pastoral lands to the south.

If you follow the **Stuart Highway** or the **Oodnadatta Track,** you'll pass the mining towns of Coober Pedy, Andamooka, and Mintabie, where people from all over the world have been turned loose in the maddening search for opal. Out here, too, are national parks, such as the daunting Simpson Desert Conservation Park, with its seemingly endless blood-red sand dunes and spinifex plains; and Lake Eyre National Park, with its dried-up saltpan that, during rare floods, is a temporary home to thousands of water birds.

### THE FLINDERS RANGES NATIONAL PARK ★

460km (285 miles) N of Adelaide

The dramatic craggy peaks and ridges that make up the Flinders Ranges rise out of the South Australian desert. The colors of the rock vary from deep red to orange, with sedimentary lines visible as they run down the sides of cliffs. Much of the greenery around here is stunted arid-land vegetation. Growing shoots and saplings, which for decades were nibbled away before they grew up, have started to turn what was once bare land back into bush. This is the result of a devastating rabbit virus introduced in 1996 and the continued culling of hundreds of thousands of wild goats. The most remarkable attraction is **Wilpena Pound,** a natural circle of cliff faces that form a gigantic depression on top of a mountainous ledge. The wind whipping over the cliff edges can produce exhilarating white-knuckle turbulence if you fly over it in a light aircraft. Kangaroos and emus can sometimes be seen wandering around the park, but outside the park, kangaroos are heavily culled.

#### ESSENTIALS

**GETTING THERE** By car, take Highway 1 out of Adelaide to Port Augusta (3½ hr.), then head east on Route 47 via Quorn and Hawker (45 min.). It's another hour

**Tips An Outback Travel Warning**

If you intend to drive through the Outback, take care. Distances between points of interest can be vast; water, gas, food, and accommodations are far apart. Always travel with a good map and plenty of advice. If you plan to travel off-road, a four-wheel-drive vehicle is a must.

to Wilpena Pound, next to the tiny settlement of Wilpena. Alternatively, take the scenic route, which doesn't have a specific name, through the Clare Valley (around 5 hr.): From Adelaide, head to Gawler and then through the Clare Valley; follow signs to Gladstone, Melrose, Wilmington, and Quorn.

**Premier Stateliner** (✆ **08/8415 5500;** www.premierstateliner.com.au) runs five buses every day from Adelaide to Port Augusta for A$35 (US$28) one-way.

**Heading Bush Adventures** (✆ **08/8356 5501;** www.headingbush.com) has great trips, including a 10-day tour to the Flinders Ranges, the Oodnadatta Track, Coober Pedy, the Simpson Desert, Uluru (Ayers Rock), the Olgas, Kings Canyon, and Aboriginal communities. This remarkable trip, which focuses on Aboriginal culture, costs A$1,400 (US$1,120)—or A$1,200 (US$960) with a YHA card (worth buying obviously)—and includes meals and bush camping.

YHA Australia (www.yha.org.au) runs a good tour to the Flinders Ranges every Friday (Apr–Oct), including a two-night stay at Andu Lodge in Quorn, a 2-day tour of the area, and return transfers to Adelaide. It costs A$299 (US$239) per person.

It's well worth doing some pre-departure Internet research to pin down other good tours, as many go out on certain dates. The best site to look them up is www.flindersoutback.com.

**VISITOR INFORMATION** Before setting off, contact the **Flinders Ranges and Outback of South Australia Regional Tourism Association (FROSATA),** P.O. Box 2083, Port Augusta, SA 5700 (✆ **1800/633 060** in Australia), for advice on roads and conditions. I strongly recommend a visit to the **Wadlata Outback Centre,** 41 Flinders Terrace, Port Augusta, SA 5700 (✆ **08/8642 4511**), an award-winning interactive museum and information center. The museum costs A$7 (US$5.60) for adults and A$4.50 (US$3.60) for children and is open Monday through Friday from 9am to 5:30pm, Saturday and Sunday from 10am to 4pm.

In Hawker, both the gas station and the post office also act as information outlets.

**GETTING AROUND** **By Car** If you decide to explore on your own using a rental car, I recommend renting one in Adelaide.

## WHERE TO STAY

**Andu Lodge** ★ This fabulous backpackers' lodge is one of the best in Australia. In Quorn, in the central Flinders Ranges (42km/26 miles from Port Augusta), the upscale former hotel is air-conditioned in summer and heated in winter. It has nice clean rooms (dorms sleep six). There's also a nice TV room, a laundry, a computer for e-mailing, and a kitchen area. The hostel runs a range of trips with an emphasis on Aboriginal culture and ecotourism. Guests can also rent mountain bikes. Quorn (pop. 1,300) is where the old Ghan railway started and finished, and where part of the movie *Gallipoli* was filmed. The town has four friendly pubs, all serving meals for A$6.50 to A$7.50 (US$5.20–US$6). The lodge also offers tours of the Flinders Ranges.

12 First St., Quorn, SA 5043. ✆ **1300/730 701** in Australia, or 08/8648 6020. Fax 08/8648 6030. steveandpaulaandulodge@bigpond.com. 64 units. A$60 (US$48) double; A$87 (US$70) family room for up to 6; A$20 (US$16) dorm bed. Breakfast included. MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Bike rental; tour desk; coin-op laundry; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV (in family rooms), no phone.

**Prairie Hotel** ★★ *Finds* If you are going to stay anywhere near the Flinders Ranges, stay here. The tiny, tin-roofed, stonewalled pub offers a memorable experience and is well worth the dusty 89km (55-mile) drive north alongside the ranges from Hawker on the A83. A new addition to the pub contains nice rooms, each with a queen-size

bed and a shower. The older-style rooms are smaller and quaint. Three units have Jacuzzis. The bar out front is a great place to meet the locals and other travelers (who all shake their heads in wonder that this magnificent place is still so undiscovered). Meals, prepared in a style the hotel likes to call "Flinders Feral Food," are very nearly the best I've had in Australia. Among the specialties are kangaroo tail soup to start and a mixed grill of emu sausages, camel steak, and kangaroo as a main course. The owner's brother runs remarkable scenic flights over Wilpena Pound and out to the salt lakes. From here you could head to the township of William Creek for a side trip to see the giant salt lake, Lake Eyre, and then onward west to Coober Pedy.

The Parachilna Overflow, opposite the hotel, is a budget option run by the same people. There are bunks, double and family rooms, and cabins, set around a communal kitchen and small pool. Bunks cost A$35 (US$28), doubles A$60 (US$48), and self-catering cabins A$80 (US$64).

Corner of High St. and West Terrace, Parachilna, SA 5730. ✆ **08/8648 4844.** Fax 08/8648 4606. www.prairiehotel.com.au. 12 units. A$125–A$170 (US$100–US$136) double; A$225 (US$180) double with Jacuzzi. Extra person A$35–A$45 (US$28–US$36). Rates include light breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar. *In room:* A/C, minibar, coffeemaker.

**Wilpena Pound Resort** The nearest place to the Wilpena Pound, this partly refurbished resort almost monopolizes the overnight tourist market here. Standard rooms are adequate and offer respite from the summer heat. The self-contained units are rooms with a queen-size and a single bed, a stovetop, a microwave, a basin, and cooking utensils. The resort also operates a campground. You can borrow a hair dryer at the reception desk. There are some good walks around the area. Half-hour scenic flights over the Ranges cost A$95 (US$76) per person for two people, and 20-minute flights cost A$80 (US$64) per person for two people. The resort also offers four-wheel-drive tours of the area.

Wilpena Pound, SA 5434. ✆ **1800/805 802** in Australia, or 08/8648 0004. Fax 08/8648 0028. www.wilpenapound.com.au. 60 units. A$115–A$145 (US$92–US$116) motel double; A$160–A$170 (US$128–US$136) self-contained unit. Extra adult A$22 (US$18), extra child 2–14 A$6.50 (US$5.20). Campsite A$22 (US$18); tent site A$16 (US$13). AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; bistro; general store; outdoor pool; game room; tour desk; laundry service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, kitchenette (only in self-contained units), fridge, coffeemaker.

### WHERE TO DINE

The **Old Ghan Restaurant,** Leigh Creek Road, Hawker (✆ **08/8648 4176**), is open for lunch and dinner Wednesday through Sunday; the restaurant used to be a railway station on the Ghan railway line to Alice Springs before the line was shifted sideways due to flooding. The food is unexciting, but the homemade pies have a following. If you find yourself in Port Augusta, the area's main town, head to the **Standpipe Motor Inn** (✆ **08/8642 4033**) for excellent Indian food. The quiet rooms are nice enough; a double goes for A$80 (US$64).

## COOBER PEDY

854km (529 miles) NW of Adelaide; 689km (427 miles) S of Alice Springs

Tourists come to this Outback opal-mining town for one thing: the people. More than 3,500 people, from 44 nations, work mainly underground here. The majority suffer from opal fever, which keeps you digging on the trail of the elusive shimmering rocks. Though some residents are secretive and keep to themselves, many others are colorful characters ready to stop for a chat and spin a few yarns.

Historically, Coober Pedy was a rough place, and it still has a certain Wild West air about it. The first opal was found here in 1915, but it wasn't until 1917, when the

Trans Continental Railway was completed, that people began seriously digging for opals. Since then, they have mainly lived underground—not surprising when you encounter the heat, the dust, and the flies for yourself.

The town got its name from the Aboriginal words *kupa piti,* commonly thought to mean "white man's burrow." Remnants of the holes left by early miners are everywhere, mostly in the form of bleached-white hills of waste called "mullock heaps." Tourists are discouraged from wandering around the tailing sites—locals are fed up by visitors who fall down the mineshafts.

As for the town, there isn't much to look at, except a couple of underground churches, some casual restaurants, a handful of opal stores, and the necessary service businesses. In the center of town you'll find lots of outdoor buildings; the hotels and youth hostel have aboveground entrances but rooms below ground. All are within stumbling distance of each other on the main street.

## ESSENTIALS

**GETTING THERE** **Regional Express** (✆ **13 17 13** in Australia, or 02/6393 5550; www.regionalexpress.com.au) flies to Coober Pedy from Adelaide. The round-trip fare is about A$340 (US$272). Check the website for discounted fares and specials. **Greyhound Australia** (✆ **13 14 99** in Australia, or 07/4690 9950; www.greyhound.com.au) runs buses from Adelaide to Coober Pedy for A$76 (US$61) for adults and A$61 (US$49) for children (3–14) one-way. The trip takes about 12 hours. The bus from Alice Springs to Coober Pedy costs A$75 (US$60) for adults and A$60 (US$48) for children. Passengers bound for Uluru (Ayers Rock) transfer at Erldunda.

If you drive from Adelaide, it will take you about 9 hours to reach Coober Pedy along the Stuart Highway. It takes 7 hours to drive the 700km (434 miles) to Alice Springs.

**VISITOR INFORMATION** The **Coober Pedy Tourist Information Centre,** Hutchison Street, Coober Pedy (✆ **1800/637 076** in Australia, or 08/8672 5298), is open Monday through Friday from 8:30am to 5pm (closed holidays). Check www.opalcapitaloftheworld.com.au for a rundown of adventure operators in the area.

## ACCOMMODATIONS YOU CAN AFFORD

### The Backpacker's Inn at Radeka's Downunder Motel ★

The other "underground" rooms in Coober Pedy are built into the side of a hill, but the centrally located hostel here is underground—some 6.5m (21 ft.) directly below the topside building. This makes for nice temperatures year-round. Odd-looking dorms have no doors and are scooped out of the rock. Most have just four beds; two large dorms sleep up to 20 people. The twin rooms are simply furnished but pleasant. The motel rooms, also dug out of the side of a hill, are comfortable and come with TVs, coffeemakers, and attached bathrooms with shower. Some have a kitchenette. Room no. 9 is huge, with a double and two sets of bunk beds. Radeka's also runs a good opal tour.

1 Oliver St., Coober Pedy, SA 5723. ✆ **08/8672 5223.** Fax 08/86725821. 150 units, 10 motel rooms. A$22 (US$18) dorm bed; A$52 (US$42) dorm double; A$90 (US$72) motel double; A$110 (US$88) motel family suite. Extra person A$15 (US$12). AE, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Bar; TV and video room; pool table; tour desk; coin-operated laundry. *In motel room:* TV, kitchenette (in some), coffeemaker.

## WHERE TO DINE

The **Opal Inn** (✆ **08/8672 5054**) offers good-value counter meals of the typical pub-grub variety. Head to **Traces** (✆ **08/8672 5147**), the township's favorite Greek restaurant, for something a bit different.

### SEEING THE TOWN

**Radeka's Downunder Motel** (see "Accommodations You Can Afford," above) runs half-day tours of the opal fields, including a visit to an underground mine. It costs A$30 (US$24) for adults and A$15 (US$12) for kids.

If you want to see parts of Australia that most Australians never see, join an honest-to-goodness **Mail Run** ★ for a 12-hour journey out into the bush. Tours leave Monday and Thursday from Coober Pedy's **Underground Books** (✆ **08/8672 5558**)—yep, it's a bookshop underground—and travel along 600km (372 miles) of dirt roads to Oodnadatta and William Creek cattle station, stopping at five stations along the route. It can get pretty hot and dusty outside (think endless horizons of flat lands), but it's relatively comfortable inside the air-conditioned four-wheel-drive, and you'll have the chance to see such wildlife as eagles, emus, and the ever-present kangaroos. Bring your own lunch or buy it along the way. Tours cost around A$120 (US$96) for adults and A$75 (US$60) for children under 12, though kids might find the long trip difficult. This up-close-and-personal look at life in the bush could easily be one of the most memorable experiences you have in Australia.

## 5 The Coorong

Few places in the world attract as much wildfowl as the **Coorong,** one of Australia's most precious sanctuaries. The Coorong area includes the mouth of the Murray River, huge Lake Alexandrina, smaller Lake Albert, and a long, thin sand spit called the Younghusband Peninsula. The **Coorong National Park** encompasses a small but by far the most scenic part of this area. The area is under environmental threat due to pollutants coming south in the Murray River from farmlands to the north. It still supports large colonies of native and visiting birds, such as the Australian pelican, black swan, royal spoonbill, greenshank, and extremely rare hooded plover.

If it were possible to count all the birds here, you'd probably run out of steam after some 45,000 ducks, 5,000 black swans, 2,000 Cape Barren geese, and 122,000 waders. This last figure is even more significant when you consider the total South Australian population of waders (200,000), and the overall Australian population (some 403,000).

Add to these figures the thousands of pelicans—with around 3,000 birds nesting here, it's the largest permanent breeding colony in Australia—gulls, terns, and cormorants, and you'll realize why the Coorong and Lower Murray Lakes form one of the most important water-bird habitats in Australia.

The national park, which stands out starkly against the degraded farmland surrounding it, is also home to several species of marsupials, including wombats.

The best time to visit the Coorong is in December and January, when the lakes are full of migratory birds from overseas. However, plenty of birds can be spotted year-round. ***Note:*** Binoculars and patience are highly recommended.

### ESSENTIALS

**GETTING THERE** The best way to visit the Coorong is by car. I highly recommend a guided tour of the area once you arrive at the main settlement of Goolwa, on the western fringe of the waterways, or at Meningie, on the eastern boundary. From Adelaide, follow the Princes Highway along the coast.

**VISITOR INFORMATION** The **Goolwa Tourist Information Centre,** BF Lawrie Lane, Goolwa (✆ **08/8555 1144**), has information on the area and can book accommodations. It's open daily from 9am to 5pm.

**GETTING AROUND** The best operator in the area is **Coorong Nature Tours** (✆ **08/8574 0037,** or 0428/714 793 mobile; www.coorongnaturetours.com), based in Narrung. David Dadd, a delightful, unassuming Cockney who fell in love with the Coorong when he arrived at the age of 11, runs the tours. He offers memorable 1-, 2-, and 3-day tours of the area, with pickup in Meningie or Adelaide. Full-day tours cost A$132 (US$106) per person from Meningie or A$185 (US$148) per person from Adelaide. Reservations are essential.

**Spirit of the Coorong Cruises** (✆ **1800/442 203** in Australia, or 08/8555 2203; www.coorongcruises.com.au), based in Goolwa, offers afternoon boat cruises on the waterways on Monday and Thursday year-round and extra cruises on Tuesday and Saturday between October and May. The cruise costs A$70 (US$56) for adults and A$52 (US$42) for kids. The company can pick you up from Adelaide for an extra A$50 (US$40) per person. There's also a 6-hour cruise every Wednesday and Sunday between October and May and every Sunday between June and September. It includes a guided walk to an Aboriginal site. This costs A$84 (US$67) for adults and A$57 (US$46) for kids.

## WHERE TO STAY

Goolwa has plenty of hotels, B&Bs, campgrounds, and trailer parks, as does the main road that runs parallel to the national park. One I prefer is the **Goolwa Camping and Tourist Park,** 40 Castle Rd., Goolwa, SA 5214 (✆ **08/8555 2144**). It has 70 trailer sites and a large area for tents. A two-berth van costs around A$30 (US$24) a night, and a six-berth A$40 (US$32) for the first two people; it's A$5 (US$4) for an extra adult or A$3 (US$2.40) for an extra child. Bring your own bedding.

**Grahams Castle Resort** This former conference center is a AAA-rated three-star backpackers' accommodations. Rooms are basic, with two single beds, heating, and a shower shared between two rooms. It's popular with budget groups, so it can get noisy.

Corner of Castle and Bradford sts., Goolwa, SA 5214. ✆ **1800/243 303** in Australia, or 08/8555 3300. Fax 08/8555 3828. 22 units. A$18 (US$14) per person. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; heated outdoor pool; tennis court; tour desk. *In room:* No phone.

**Poltalloch** ★★ Smack in the middle of nowhere on the eastern edge of the Coorong, Poltalloch is a working farm property—with plenty of cows, ducks, chickens, and dogs wandering about—that seems more like a village. The whole place is classified as a heritage building by the National Trust of South Australia, and history is evident everywhere, from the cottages once used by farmhands to the giant wooden shearing shed and other outbuildings crammed with relics from the past.

You have a choice of five cottages. The Shearer's Hut is a stone cottage that sleeps up to nine people; the Overseer's stone cottage sleeps up to eight people; the Boundary Rider's Cottage is built of timber, iron, and stone, and sleeps five; and the Station Hand's Cottage sleeps four. The Shearer's Quarters is mainly for large groups and sleeps 12. All of the units are modern and comfortable inside and have their own kitchen facilities and barbecues. I loved the mix of rural feeling and modern conveniences. There's a private beach if you want to swim in the lake, and guests have the use of a dinghy, a canoe, and a Ping-Pong table. Breakfast provisions are available for A$15 (US$12) per person. Coorong Nature Tours will pick you up from here for no extra charge. There's plenty of bird life all around.

Poltalloch. P.M.B. 3, Narrung via Tailem Bend, SA 5260. ✆ **08/8574 0043.** Fax 08/8574 0065. www.poltalloch.com.au. 5 units. A$110–A$160 (US$88–US$128) for 2 people. Extra person A$35 (US$28). MC, V. **Amenities:** Tennis court; use of watersports equipment; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, kitchen, fridge, coffeemaker, iron.

# 12

# Melbourne

*by Marc Llewellyn*

Melbourne (pronounced *Mel*-bun), the capital of Victoria and Australia's second-largest city, is a cultural melting pot. For a start, more people of Greek descent live here than in any other city except Athens. Chinese, Italian, Vietnamese, and Lebanese immigrants have all left their mark. In fact, almost one-third of Melbournians were born overseas or have parents who were born overseas. With such a diverse population, and with trams rattling through the streets and stately European architecture surrounding you, you could easily forget you're in Australia.

Melbourne, which has a population of over three million, enjoys a reputation for being at the head of the pack when it comes to shopping, restaurants, fashion, music, nightlife, and cafe culture. It frequently beats out other state capitals in bids for major international concerts, plays, exhibitions, and sporting events, such as the Formula One Grand Prix.

The city also revels in a healthy rivalry with its northern neighbor, Sydney, but it's interesting to note that almost all Melbournians adore their city—often described as the most livable in the world—whereas Sydneysiders are mostly half-hearted in their praise for their home.

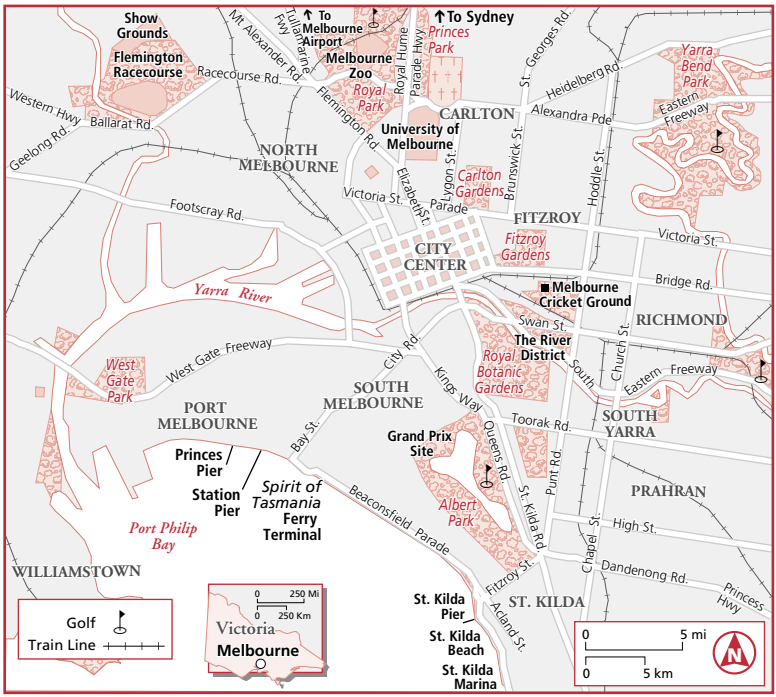
Melbourne's roots go back to the 1850s, when gold was found in the surrounding hills. British settlers took up residence and prided themselves on coming freely, rather than having been forced here in convict chains. The city grew wealthy and remained largely a conservative bastion until World War II, when another wave of immigration, this time mainly from southern Europe, made it a more relaxed place.

## 1 Orientation

### ARRIVING

**BY PLANE** **Qantas** (✆ **13 13 13** in Australia, or 800/227-4500 in the U.S. and Canada; www.qantas.com.au) and discount airline **Virgin Blue** ✆ **13 67 89** in Australia, or 07/3295 2296; www.virginblue.com.au) both fly to Melbourne from all state capitals. Qantas's new discount arm, **Jetstar** (✆ **13 15 38** in Australia, or 03/8341 4901; www.jetstar.com.au) flies to and from Sydney, Hobart, and Launceston. Check websites above for discount offers. Jetstar flies in and out of Avalon Airport, about a 50-minute-drive to Melbourne's city center. Sunbus (✆ **03/9689 6880**) meets all flights coming into Avalon and runs to the airport from 167 Franklin St. and the Spencer Street Transit Centre. One-way tickets cost A$17 (US$14) for adults, and adults pay A$26 (US$21) for a round-trip journey. Kids' tickets cost A$8 (US$6.40) each way.

Melbourne's main international and domestic airport is **Tullamarine Airport,** 22km (14 miles) northwest of the city center. All flights, apart from those run by Jetstar (above), arrive here. If you're traveling from Sydney, the flight will take you




around 1 hour 20 minutes. It's a 5-minute walk between the international and domestic terminals. Travelers' information desks, on both levels of the international terminal, are open from 6am until the last flight. The international terminal has snack bars, a restaurant, currency-exchange facilities, duty-free shops, and mailboxes. There's also a post office, open daily from 9am to 5pm; stamps are available from machines after hours. ATMs are in both terminals. Showers are on the first floor of the international area. Baggage trolleys are free in the international baggage claim hall but cost A$3 (US$2.40) in the parking lot, departure lounge, or domestic terminal. Baggage lockers cost A$4 to A$8 (US$3.20–US$6.40) per day, depending on size. The **Hilton Melbourne Airport** (✆ **03/9338 2322**) is within walking distance of the terminals.

**Thrifty** (✆ **1800/652 008** in Australia, or 03/9330 1522), **Budget** (✆ **13 27 27** in Australia, or 800/527-0700 in the U.S.), **Avis** (✆ **1800/225 533** in Australia, or 03/9338 1800), **Hertz** (✆ **13 30 39** in Australia, or 03/9379 9955), and **Delta Europcar** (✆ **1300/131 390** in Australia, or 03/9417 2311) have airport rental desks. The Tullamarine Freeway to and from the airport joins with the CityLink, an electronic tollway system. Drivers need a CityLink pass. A 24-hour pass costs A$9.10 (US$7.30). Check with your car-rental company.

**Skybus** (✆ **03/9670 7992;** www.skybus.com.au) picks up passengers in front of the baggage claim area every 15 minutes from 7am to 6:30pm, half-hourly from 7pm until 12:30am, and hourly from 1am to 5am.

The trip into the city center takes around 35 minutes and costs A$13 (US$10) one-way for adults and A$6 (US$4.80) for children under 17. The service travels direct to

Spencer Street Railway Station, where free shuttle buses transfer you to city hotels. When you want to return to the airport, either turn up at the terminal next to Spencer Street railway Station or book the Skybus service a few hours in advance. Allow at least 40 minutes for traveling time to the airport. Buy tickets from Skybus desks outside the terminals.

A **taxi** to the city center takes about 30 minutes and costs around A$45 (US$36).

**BY TRAIN** Interstate trains arrive at **Spencer Street Railway Station,** Spencer and Little Collins streets (5 blocks from Swanston St. in the city center). Taxis and buses connect with the city.

The **Sydney-Melbourne *XPT*** travels between Australia's two largest cities daily; trip time is 10½ hours. The full fare for economy class is A$110 (US$88) on the day of travel, A$66 (US$53) 1 week in advance, and A$55 (US$44) 2 weeks in advance. First-class fares are A$154 (US$123), A$92 (US$74), and A$77 (US$62), respectively. A first-class sleeper costs A$231 (US$185), A$169 (US$135), and A$154 (US$123), respectively. Students presenting an ISIC international student card pay the 2-weeks-in-advance price in all categories, even if booked on the day of travel. For more information, contact **Countrylink** (✆ **13 22 32** in Australia, or 02/8202 2000; www.countrylink.info).

The ***Overland*** provides daily service to and from Melbourne and Adelaide (trip time: 12 hr.). From Melbourne to Adelaide it's an overnight trip, costing A$175 (US$140) in first class and A$59 (US$47) in a sleeper chair. The day trip from Adelaide to Melbourne costs A$149 (US$119) in first class and A$59 (US$47) in second class. Round-trips cost A$245 (US$196) in first class and A$118 (US$94) in second class. For more information, contact **Great Southern Railways** (✆ **13 21 47** in Australia, or 08/8213 4592; www.gsr.com.au).

**Daylink** services also connect Melbourne with Adelaide. This trip is by train from Melbourne to Bendigo and by bus from Bendigo to Adelaide. Total trip time is 11 hours, and the fare is A$62 (US$50) for adults and A$31 (US$25) for children. The **Canberra Link** connects Melbourne with the nation's capital; it's a train journey from Melbourne to Wadonga, and bus from there to Canberra. The journey takes around 11 hours and costs A$59 (US$47) for adults, and A$37 (US$30) for kids. First-class fares are around A$20 (US$16) more expensive. For information and reservations, contact **V/Line** (✆ **13 61 96** in Australia, or 03/9619 5000; www.vlinepassenger.com.au).

**BY BUS** Several bus companies connect Melbourne with other capitals and regional areas of Victoria. Among the biggest is **Greyhound Australia** (✆ **13 14 99** in Australia, or 07/4690 9950; www.greyhound.com.au). Coaches serve Melbourne's **Transit Centre,** 58 Franklin St., 2 blocks north of the Spencer Street Railway Station. Trams and taxis serve the station; **V/Line buses** (✆ **13 61 96** in Australia, or 03/9619 5000; www.vlinepassenger.com.au), which travel all over Victoria, depart from the Spencer Street Bus Terminal.

**BY CAR** You can drive from Sydney to Melbourne along the Hume Highway (a trip of about 9½ hr.), via Goulburn in NSW (good for supplies), and Wangaratta in Victoria (where you can detour into the Victorian Alps, if you wish). Another route is along the coastal Princes Highway, for which you will need a minimum of 2 days, with stops. For information on all aspects of road travel in Victoria, contact the **Royal Automotive Club of Victoria** (✆ **03/9607 2222;** www.racv.com.au).

## VISITOR INFORMATION

The first stop on any visitor's itinerary should be the **Melbourne Visitor Centre,** Federation Square, Swanston and Flinders streets (✆ **03/9658 9658;** www.thatsmelbourne.com.au). The center serves as a one-stop shop for tourism information, accommodations, tour bookings, event ticketing, public transport information, and ticket sales. Also here are an ATM, Internet terminals, and interactive multimedia providing information on Melbourne and Victoria. The center is open daily from 9am to 6pm. The Melbourne Greeter Service also operates from the Melbourne Visitor Centre. This service is available in 20 languages and connects visitors to enthusiastic local volunteers who offer free one-on-one, half-day orientation tours of the city. Book at least 3 days in advance (✆ **03/9658 9658;** greeter@melbourne.vic.gov.au). The Melbourne Visitor Centre also operates staffed information booths in Bourke Street Mall.

You'll find some information services at **Information Victoria,** 356 Collins St. (✆ **1300/366 356** in Australia; www.information.vic.gov.au). In the central city area, look for **Melbourne's City Ambassadors**—people, usually volunteers, who give information and directions.

Good websites on the city include CitySearch Melbourne (http://melbourne.citysearch.com.au), www.onlymelbourne.com.au, www.melbourne.vic.gov.au, and www.visitmelbourne.com.

## CITY LAYOUT

Melbourne is on the Yarra River and stretches inland from Port Philip Bay, which lies to its south. On a map, you'll see a distinct central oblong area surrounded by Flinders Street to the south, Latrobe Street to the north, Spring Street to the east, and Spencer Street to the west. Cutting north to south through its center are the two main shopping thoroughfares, Swanston Street and Elizabeth Street. Cross streets between these major thoroughfares include Bourke Street Mall, a pedestrian-only shopping promenade. If you continue south along Swanston Street and over the river, it turns into St. Kilda Road, which runs to the coast. Melbourne's various urban "villages," including South Yarra, Richmond, Carlton, and Fitzroy, surround the city center. The seaside suburb of St. Kilda is known for its diverse restaurants. If you've visited Sydney, you'll find Melbourne's city center smaller and far less congested with people and cars.

## THE NEIGHBORHOODS IN BRIEF

Melbourne is huge. At more than 6,110 sq. km (2,383 sq. miles), it's one of the biggest cities in the world. Below are the areas of most interest to visitors.

**City Center** Made up of a grid of streets north of the Yarra River, the city center is bordered by Flinders, Latrobe, Spring, and Spencer streets. There's some good shopping and charming cafes, and in recent years an active nightlife has sprung up with the opening of a swath of funky bars and restaurants playing live and recorded music to suit all ages. The gateway to the city is the brown Flinders Street Station, with its dome and clock tower, flanked by the stunning new Federation Square precinct.

**Chinatown** This colorful section centers on Little Bourke Street between Swanston and Exhibition streets. The area marks Australia's oldest permanent Chinese settlement, dating from the 1850s, when a few boardinghouses catered to Chinese prospectors lured by gold rushes. Plenty of cheap restaurants crowd its alleyways. Tram: Any to the city.

**Carlton** North of the city center, Carlton is a suburb famous for the Italian restaurants along Lygon Street with outdoor seating—though the quality of the food varies. It's the home of the University of Melbourne, so there's a student scene. From Bourke Street Mall, count on a 15-minute walk to the restaurant strip. Tram: 1 or 22 from Swanston Street.

**Fitzroy** A ruggedly bohemian place, 2km (1¼ miles) north of the city center, Fitzroy is raw and funky, filled with students and artists, and popular for people-watching. Fitzroy revolves around Brunswick Street, with its cheap restaurants, busy cafes, late-night bookshops, art galleries, and pubs. Around the corner, on Johnston Street, is a growing Spanish quarter with tapas bars, flamenco restaurants, and Spanish clubs. Tram: 11 from Collins Street.

**Richmond** One of Melbourne's earliest settlements is a multicultural quarter noted for its historic streets and back lanes. Victoria Street is reminiscent of Ho Chi Minh City, with Vietnamese sights, sounds, aromas, and restaurants everywhere. Bridge Road is a bustling discount fashion precinct. Tram: 48 or 75 from Flinders Street to Bridge Road; 70 from Batmans Avenue at Princes Bridge to Swan Street; 109 from Bourke Street to Victoria Street.

**Southgate & Southbank** This flashy entertainment district on the banks of the Yarra River opposite Flinders Street Station (linked by pedestrian bridges) is home to the Crown Casino, Australia's largest. Southbank has a myriad of themed restaurants, bars, cafes, nightclubs, cinemas, and designer shops. On the city side of the river is the Melbourne Aquarium. All are a 10-minute stroll from Flinders Street Station. Tram: 8 from Swanston Street.

**Docklands** Near the city center, at the rear of the Spencer Street station, this old industrial area has become the biggest development in Melbourne. On the waterfront, NewQuay has a range of restaurants, shops, and cinemas. To celebrate the dominance of Australian Rules Football, Melbournians constructed a 52,000-seat stadium, the Telstra Dome, to house their favorite game. Tram: City Circle (free), or Docklands is accessible by river cruise boats.

**St. Kilda** Hip and bohemian in a shabby-chic sort of way, this bayside suburb (6km/3¾ miles south of the city center) has Melbourne's highest concentration of restaurants, ranging from glitzy to cheap, as well as some superb cake shops and delis. Historically it was Melbourne's red-light district. The Esplanade hugs a pleasant "beach" (with brown water) and is the scene of a lively arts and crafts market on Sunday. Acland Street houses many restaurants. Check out Luna Park, one of the world's oldest fun parks, built in 1912, and ride the historic wooden roller coaster. Tram: 10 or 12 from Collins Street; 15 or 16 from Swanston Street; 96 from Bourke Street.

**South Yarra/Prahan** This posh part of town abounds with chic boutiques, cinemas, nightclubs, and galleries. Chapel Street is famous for its upscale eateries and designer fashion houses, while Commercial Road is popular with the gay and lesbian community. Just off Chapel Street in Prahan is Greville Street, a Bohemian enclave of retro boutiques and music outlets. Every Sunday from noon to 5pm the Greville Street Market offers arts, crafts, old clothes, and jewelry. Tram: 8 or 72 from Swanston Street.

**South Melbourne** One of the city's oldest working-class districts, South

Melbourne is known for its historic buildings, old-fashioned pubs and hotels, and markets. Tram: 12 from Collins Street; 1 from Swanston Street.

**The River District** The muddy-looking Yarra River runs southeast past the Royal Botanic Gardens and near other attractions such as the Victorian Arts Centre, the National Gallery of Victoria, the Sidney Myer Music Bowl, and the Melbourne Cricket Ground, all described later in this chapter. Birrarung Marr is the first new major parkland in Melbourne more than 100 years.

**Williamstown** A lack of extensive development has left this outer waterfront suburb with a rich architectural heritage. It centers on Ferguson Street and Nelson Place—both reminiscent of old England. On the Strand overlooking the sea is a line of bistros and restaurants, and a World War II warship museum. Ferry: from Southgate, the World Trade Center, or St. Kilda Pier.

## 2 Getting Around

### BY PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

Trams, trains, and buses are operated by several private companies, including the National Bus Company, Yarra Trams, and Connex, to name a few. Generally, both tourists and locals travel around the city and inner suburbs by tram.

**BY TRAM** Melbourne has the oldest tram network in the world. Trams are an essential part of the city and a major cultural icon. Several hundred trams run along 325km (202 miles) of track. Instead of phasing out this non-smoggy method of transport, Melbourne is busily expanding the network.

Tram travel within the city and to all suburbs mentioned in this chapter costs A$2.20 (US$1.75) for adults, A$1.20 (US95¢) for children for a single journey. Or you can buy a **2-Hour Metcard,** good for unlimited transport on buses or trams for up to 2 hours, for A$3.10 (US$2.50) for adults and A$1.80 (US$1.45) for children. If you plan to pack in the sightseeing, try the **Zone 1 Metcard Daily ticket,** which allows travel on all transport (trams and trains) within the city and the surrounding suburbs mentioned in this chapter from 5:30am to midnight (when transportation stops). It costs A$5.90 (US$4.70) for adults and A$3.10 (US$2.50) for children.

Buy single-trip and 2-hour tram tickets at ticket machines on trams, special ticket offices (such as at the tram terminal on Elizabeth St., near the corner of Flinders St.), at most newsdealers, and at Metcard vending machines at many railway stations. A Metcard needs to be validated by the Metcard Validator machine on the tram, on the station platform, or on the bus before each journey; the only exception to this is the 2-Hour Metcard purchased from a vending machine on a tram, which is automatically validated for that journey only. Vending machines on trams accept only coins—but give change—whereas larger vending machines at train stations accept coins and paper money and give change up to A$10 (US$8).

You can pick up a free route map from the Melbourne Visitor Centre, Federation Square, or the **Met Information Centre,** 103 Elizabeth St., at the corner of Collins Street (✆ **13 16 38** in Australia; www.metlinkmelbourne.com.au), which is open Monday through Friday from 8:30am to 4:30pm, and Saturday from 9am to 1pm.

The **City Circle Tram** (www.victrip.com.au/city_circle) is the best way to get around the center of Melbourne—and it's free. The burgundy-and-cream trams travel a circular route between all the major central attractions, and past shopping malls and arcades. The

trams run, in both directions, every 10 minutes between 10am and 6pm, except Good Friday and December 25. The trams run along all the major thoroughfares including Flinders and Spencer streets. Burgundy signs mark City Circle Tram stops.

Normal trams stop at numbered green-and-gold tram-stop signs, sometimes in the middle of the road (so beware of oncoming traffic!). To get off the tram, press the red button near handrails or pull the cord above your head.

## BY EXPLORER BUS

**Melbourne Explorer Gray Line** (✆ **1300/858 687** in Australia, or 03/9663 4455; www.grayline.com) operates buses that pick up and drop off at 21 stops around the city, including the Melbourne Aquarium, Crown Casino, Queen Victoria Market, Captain Cook's Cottage, Chinatown, Melbourne Zoo, and the Botanic Gardens. The full circuit takes an hour. There's full commentary on board. You can hop on and off during the day. A bus returns to each stop half-hourly. The first bus leaves Town Hall on Swanston Street at 9:30am and the last at 3pm. Tickets cost A$36 (US$29) for adults, A$18 (US$14) for children under 14. Buy from the driver or at the little tour booth outside Melbourne Town Hall.

## BY BOAT

**Melbourne River Cruises** (✆ **03/9614 1215;** www.melbcruises.com.au) offers a range of boat trips up and down the Yarra River, including to Williamstown and Docklands. It's a really interesting way to get a feel for the city, and the tours include commentaries. Tours cost from A$20 (US$16) one-way and A$34 (US$27) round-trip for adults; A$11 (US$8.80) one-way, A$19 (US$15) round-trip for kids; and A$50 (US$40) one-way, A$85 (US$68) round-trip for families. Call ahead to confirm cruise departure times, as they change, and pick up tickets from the Blue Melbourne River cruises kiosks at Federation Square Riverfront (opposite Flinders Street Station).

## BY TAXI

Cabs are plentiful in the city, but it may be difficult to hail one in the city center late on Friday and Saturday night. Taxi companies include **Silver Top** (✆ **13 10 08** in Australia, or 03/9345 3455), **Embassy** (✆ **13 17 55** in Australia, or 03/9277 3444), and **Black Cabs Combined** (✆ **13 22 27** in Australia). A large, illuminated rooftop light indicates that the cab is unoccupied and available.

## BY CAR

Driving in Melbourne is not always fun. Roads can be confusing, there are trams and aggressive drivers, and there is a strange rule about turning right from the left lane at major intersections in the downtown center (which leaves the left-hand lane free for oncoming trams and through traffic). Here, you must wait for the lights to turn amber before turning. Also, you must always stop behind a tram if it stops because passengers usually step into the road. Add to this the general lack of parking and expensive hotel valet parking, and you'll know why it's better to get on a tram instead. For road rules, pick up a copy of the Victorian Road Traffic handbook from bookshops or from a **Vic Roads** office (✆ **13 11 71** in Australia for the nearest office).

Major car-rental companies, all with offices at Tullamarine Airport, include **Avis,** 400 Elizabeth St. (✆ **03/9663 6366**); **Budget,** 398 Elizabeth St. (✆ **03/9203 4844**); **Hertz,** 97 Franklin St. (✆ **03/9698 2555**); **Thrifty,** 390 Elizabeth St. (✆ **03/9663 5200**); and **Europcar,** 89 Franklin St. (✆ **13 10 90** in Australia, or 03/8633 0000). Expect to pay at least A$40 (US$32) a day for a small car.

## *FAST FACTS:* Melbourne

***American Express*** The main office is at 235 Collins St. (✆ **03/9633 6333**). It's open Monday through Friday from 9am to 5:30pm, and Saturday from 9am to noon.

***Business Hours*** In general, stores are open Monday through Wednesday and Saturday from 9am to 5:30pm, Thursday from 9am to 6pm, Friday from 9am to 9pm, and Sunday from 10am to 5pm. The larger department stores stay open on Thursday till 6pm and Friday until 9pm. Banks are open Monday through Thursday from 9:30am to 4pm, and Friday from 9:30am to 5pm.

***Camera Repair*** **Vintech Camera Repairs,** 5th Floor, 358 Lonsdale St. (✆ **03/9602 1820,** or 0418/515 662 mobile), is well regarded.

***Consulates*** The following English-speaking countries have consulates in Melbourne: United States, Level 6, 553 St. Kilda Rd. (✆ **03/9526 5900**); United Kingdom, Level 17, 90 Collins St. (✆ **03/9650 4155**); and Canada, 1st Floor, 123 Camberwell Rd., Hawthorn (✆ **03/9811 9999**).

***Dentist*** Call the **Dental Emergency Service** (✆ **03/9341 0222**) for emergency referral to a local dentist.

***Doctor*** The "casualty" department at the **Royal Melbourne Hospital,** Grattan Street, Parkville (✆ **03/9342 7000**), responds to emergencies. The **Traveller's Medical & Vaccination Centre,** 2nd Floor, 393 Little Bourke St. (✆ **03/9602 5788**), offers full vaccination and travel medical services.

***Emergencies*** In an emergency, call ✆ **000** for police, ambulance, or the fire department.

***Internet Access*** There are many Internet cafes along Elizabeth Street, between Flinders and Latrobe streets, and around Flinders Lane and Little Bourke Street in the Chinatown area. Most are open early until well into the night.

***Lost Property*** Contact the nearest police station or visit the Melbourne Town Hall, 90–120 Swanston St. (✆ **03/9658 9774**).

***Pharmacies (Chemist Shops)*** The **McGibbony & Beaumont Pharmacy** is in the Grand Hyatt hotel complex, 123 Collins St. (✆ **03/9650 1823**). It's open Monday through Thursday from 8am to 6:30pm, Friday from 8am to 7pm, Saturday from 9:30am to 2:30pm, and Sunday from 9:30am to noon.

***Post Office*** The well-known General Post Office (GPO) at the corner of Bourke Street Mall and Elizabeth Street has closed. The post office at 230 Elizabeth St. (✆ **13 13 18** in Australia) is open Monday through Friday 8:30am to 5:30pm, Saturday 9am to 4pm, and Sunday 10am to 4pm.

***Safety*** St. Kilda might be coming up in the world, but walking there alone at night still isn't wise. Parks and gardens can also be risky at night, as can the area around the King Street nightclubs.

***Taxes*** Sales tax, where it exists, is included in the price, as is the 10% Goods and Services Tax (GST). There is no hotel tax in Melbourne.

***Telephones*** For directory assistance, call ✆ **1223;** for international directory assistance, call ✆ **1225.**

***Weather*** Call ✆ **1196** for recorded weather information.

## 3 Where to Stay

Melbourne is generally less expensive to stay in than Sydney, and getting a room is generally easy enough on weekends, when business travelers are back home. You need to book well in advance, however, during the city's hallmark events (say, the weekend before the Melbourne Cup, and during the Grand Prix and the Ford Australia Open). Hostels in the St. Kilda area tend to fill up quickly in December and January. Always check Internet prices on the hotel websites—they can end up cheaper than the standard rates quoted in this chapter.

Once considered dead after offices closed for the day, the city center has been rejuvenated in recent years, and you'll feel right in the heart of the action if you stay there. Otherwise, the suburbs are all exciting satellites, with good street life, restaurants, and pubs—and just a quick tram ride from the city center. Transportation from the airport to the suburbs is a little more expensive and complicated than to the city center, however.

If you arrive without booked accommodations, contact either of the **travelers' information desks** (✆ **03/9297 1814**), one on each floor of the international terminal and open daily from 6am to the last flight. Or try the **Best of Victoria Booking Service,** Melbourne Visitor Centre, Federation Square (✆ **03/9650 3663**), open weekdays from 9am to 6pm and weekends from 9am to 5pm.

### IN THE CITY CENTER

**Ibis Melbourne** ★ *Value* A good deal, the Ibis is right next door to the bus station and a short walk from the central shopping areas. Rooms in the AAA-rated four-star hotel are spacious, immaculate, and bright, and have attached showers. Apartments come with kitchenettes and tubs. All guests have free use of the swimming pool, sauna, and Jacuzzi just up the road at the historic Melbourne City Baths.

15–21 Therry St., Melbourne, VIC 3000. ✆ **1300/656 565** in Australia, 800/221-4542 in the U.S. and Canada, 0800/44 44 22 in New Zealand, or 03/9639 2399. Fax 03/9662 9263. www.ibishotel.com. 250 units (some with shower only). A$109–A$119 (US$87–US$95) double; A$149 (US$119) 1-bedroom apt. Extra person A$30 (US$24). Children under 12 stay free in parent's room. Ask about packages. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking A$11 (US$8.80). **Amenities:** Free use of nearby pool, sauna, and Jacuzzi. *In room:* A/C, TV, kitchenette (in apts), minibar, coffeemaker, iron.

**Kingsgate Hotel** Only a 10-minute walk from the city, this interesting hotel feels like a basic B&B, though a total refurbishment in late 2002—"to attract airline staff"—gave it a better look. From the outside, it resembles a terrace building, but inside it's a maze of corridors and rooms. The staff is very friendly. The least expensive economy rooms are for backpackers only. They have two single beds and a hand basin; there's barely enough room to swing a backpack. Pricier executive rooms are light and spacious, with double beds or two twins as well as bathrooms. The 15 or so deluxe quad rooms have double beds and two singles. A cooked breakfast costs A$7 (US$5.60) extra. Check the Internet for really good deals.

131 King St., Melbourne, VIC 3000. ✆ **1300/734 171** in Australia, or 03/9629 4171. Fax 03/9629 7110. www.kingsgatehotel.com.au. 225 units, 104 with bathroom. A$99–A$129 (US$79–US$103) double; A$119–A$149 (US$95–US$119) triple; A$169 (US$135) deluxe quad. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking A$7 (US$5.60) at Crown Casino, a 5-min. walk away. **Amenities:** Tour desk. *In room:* TV.

**Ramada Melbourne** ★ *Finds* Opened in 2003, this compact four-star hotel opposite Flinders Street Railway Station offers light and comfortable rooms. It's quiet and pleasantly welcoming and is a short walk to the main shopping streets. It's also a stroll away from Federation Square, the Crown Casino Entertainment Complex, and the

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1/4 km
Albert Heights Apartments 3
Fountain Terrace 9
Georgian Court Guest House 6
Hotel Claremont 12
Hotel Tolarno 10
Ibis Melbourne 1
Kingsgate Hotel 8
The Nunnery Guesthouse 4
Olembia Private Hotel 11
Ramada Melbourne 7
Somerset Gordon Place 5
Toad Hall 2
0
250 Mi
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250 Km
Victoria
Melbourne
To Melbourne Zoo
To Carlton
To Fitzroy
To Airport (20 km)
To East Melbourne
To St. Kilda, South Melbourne
To South Yarra
Church
Information
Post Office
Tram Line
CHINATOWN
CITY CENTER
CARLTON GARDENS
FITZROY GARDENS
TREASURY GARDENS
ALEXANDRA GARDENS
QUEEN VICTORIA GARDENS
BIRRARUNG MARR
ELAGSTAFF GARDENS
Museum of Victoria
Melbourne Central
Houses of Parliament
Princess Theatre
St. Patrick's Cathedral
Myer Store
David Jones
General Post Office
Bourke Street Mall
City Square
Federation Square
Flinders St. Railway Station
Spencer St. Interstate Railway Station
Princes Bridge
Queens Bridge
Kings Bridge
Melbourne Cricket Ground
Melbourne Park National Tennis Centre
Yarra River
Southgate
Southbank Blvd.
Queensbridge St.
St. Kilda Rd.
Wellington Parade South
Batman Ave.
Victoria Parade
Albert St.
Gisborne St.
Nicholson St.
Spring St.
Exhibition St.
Russell St.
Swanston St.
Elizabeth St.
Queen St.
Little Lonsdale St.
Lonsdale St.
Little Bourke St.
Bourke St.
Little Collins St.
Collins St.
Flinders Lane
Market St.
Flinders St.
William St.
King St.
Latrobe St.
A'Beckett St.
Franklin St.
Peel St.
Dudley St.
Macarthur St.
Lansdowne St.
King St.
Spencer St.

Southbank district. Though it shouldn't really make it into a budget edition of a Frommer's guide, you can get some wonderful packages here, including a weekend special booked over the Internet for A$159 (US$127) per night with breakfast.

270 Flinders St., Melbourne, VIC 3000. ✆ **1300/726 232** in Australia, or 03/9654 6888. Fax 03/9654 0368. www.ramadamelbourne.com.au. 179 units. A$340 (US$272) standard room; A$350 (US$280) with water views. Extra person A$45 (US$36). Check Internet for packages. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking A$20 (US$16). **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; business center; 24-hr. room service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, dataport, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron, safe.

**Somerset Gordon Place** ★★ These apartments, in an 1884 National Trust–listed building, are some of the best I've seen. They are a good alternative for travelers who like to cook their own food. The spacious contemporary apartments come with full kitchens, including a dishwasher, and maid service. Those in the north block are farther back from the road, too. More than half the units have a tub, but specify when booking if you want to make sure you get one. The place was formally part of the Oakford stable of hotels but is now run by Ascott International. It was refurbished in late 2004 and mutated from a three-star to a four-and-a-half-star property—with a price rise to pay for it all, of course.

Still in the old stable though is the well-placed **Oakford on Lygon** ★★, 2–9 Finlay St., Carlton, VIC 3053 (✆ **03/8341 4777;** www.oakford.com), about a 10-minute walk from the city center. The rooms here have no kitchen but offer great value, and I highly recommend them.

24 Little Bourke St., Melbourne, VIC 3000. ✆ **1800/818 237** in Australia, or 03/9663 2888. Fax 03/9639 1537. www.somersetgordonplace.com. 64 apts. A$135–A$155 (US$108–US$124) studio; A$195–A$215 (US$156–US$172) 1-bedroom apt. Extra person A$25 (US$20). Ask about weekend packages, corporate rates, and long-term discounts. AE, DC, MC, V. Parking A$13 (US$10) for 24 hours. **Amenities:** Restaurant; small heated outdoor pool; exercise room; Jacuzzi; sauna; business center; limited room service; dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, dataport, kitchen, minibar, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

**Toad Hall** ★ *Value* "It's one of the best in Australia," one well-traveled guest said of Toad Hall. I have to agree; this 1858 mansion offers excellent value. It's just down the road from Queen Victoria Market and the Melbourne Central train/tram station, and only a few minutes' walk to the main shopping areas. Dorms are segregated by sex, with four to six bunk beds in each. Doubles and twins are small but, like the dorms, clean and quite comfortable, with springy beds. I really liked the large communal kitchen, dining room, and courtyard.

441 Elizabeth St., Melbourne, VIC 3000. ✆ **03/9600 9010.** Fax 03/9600 9013. www.toadhallhotel.com.au. 85 dorm beds in 16 rooms; 8 doubles, 4 with bathroom; 12 twin rooms, 2 with bathroom. A$70 (US$56) double/twin without bathroom; A$90 (US$72) double/twin with bathroom; A$25 (US$20) dorm bed. MC, V. Parking A$6 (US$4.80). **Amenities:** Tour desk; coin-op laundry; nonsmoking rooms; 3 TV lounges. *In room:* Fridge, coffeemaker.

## IN CARLTON

**Albert Heights Executive Apartments** ★ For good, moderately priced accommodations with cooking facilities, you can't go wrong with the Albert Heights, a favorite of American travelers. It's in a nice area of Melbourne, about a 10-minute walk from the city center. There are parks at each end of the street. Each self-contained unit in the brick building is large and attractive. If you want your own space or are traveling with your family, you can use the sofa bed in the living room. Standard apartments come with a double bed, deluxe one-bedroom apartments with a queen-size bed, and deluxe two-bedroom apartments with a queen-size and two large singles.

Each unit comes with a kitchen with a microwave (no conventional oven), dining area, and large bathroom. Check the website for major discounts.

83 Albert St., East Melbourne, VIC 3002. ✆ **1800/800 117** in Australia, or 03/9419 0955. Fax 03/9419 9517. www.albertheights.com.au. 34 units. A$170 (US$136) standard apt; A$215 (US$172) deluxe 1-bed apt; A$235 (US$188) deluxe 2-bed apt. Extra adult A$20 (US$16), extra child A$15 (US$12). Ask about special deals. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. Tram: 42 or 109. **Amenities:** Jacuzzi; tour desk; car-rental desk; babysitting; laundry service; dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, kitchen, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron, safe.

**Georgian Court Guest House** The comfortable Georgian Court's appearance hasn't changed much since it was built in 1910—and it still fits like a favorite shirt. The sitting and dining rooms have high ceilings and offer old-world atmosphere. The guest rooms, furnished with little more than plain pine furniture and a double bed, still have charm. The Georgian Court is behind the Hilton, a 15-minute walk from the city center. One room comes with a queen-size bed and a Jacuzzi.

21 George St., East Melbourne, VIC 3002. ✆ **03/9419 6353.** Fax 03/9416 0895. www.georgiancourt.com.au 31 units, 21 with bathroom. A$109 (US$87) double without bathroom; A$129 (US$103) double with bathroom; A$139 (US$111) queen spa room. A$10–A$20 (US$8–US$16) surcharge during busy periods. Extra adult A$20 (US$16), extra child under 15 A$12 (US$9.60). Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. Tram: 75 from Flinders St., or 48 from Spencer St. **Amenities:** Access to nearby health club; tour desk; car-rental desk; coin-op laundry; same-day dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron, safe.

## IN FITZROY

**The Nunnery Guesthouse** ★★ *Value* This former convent offers pleasant accommodations just a short tram ride from the city center. On the city's edge, The Nunnery is perfectly situated near the restaurant and nightlife scenes of Brunswick and Lygon streets, in nearby Carlton. This informal, friendly place is well suited to couples and families. The Nunnery is split into three separate buildings, the Guesthouse, the Townhouse, and The Nunnery Budget Accommodation. Built in the 1860s, the Guesthouse has high ceilings, handmade light fixtures, polished floorboards, marble fireplaces, and a hand-turned staircase. The Townhouse was built in the early 1900s and is comfy, stylish, and decorated with tasteful furnishings and artwork. Rooms in both buildings have wood floors, rugs, and leafy views, and are quite lovely. All rooms share bathrooms. There are no elevators. The Budget Accommodation is in the former home of the Daughters of Charity, built in the 1880s. It features a grand staircase, stained-glass windows, and religious artwork. The rooms, all nonsmoking, are simple (some come with a TV) but pleasant, and there are dorm rooms, with 3 to 12 beds each.

116 Nicholson St., Fitzroy, Melbourne, VIC 3065. ✆ **1800/032 635** in Australia, or 03/9419 8637. Fax 03/9417 7736. www.nunnery.com.au. 30 units, none with bathroom. Guesthouse A$110 (US$88) double; A$120 (US$96) family (guesthouse rates include breakfast). Townhouse A$110–A$125 (US$88–US$100) double. Budget A$85 (US$68) double; A$95 (US$76) triple. Dorm rooms A$26–A$30 (US$21–US$24) per person. MC, V. Free parking (reservation required). Tram: 96 to stop 13 (East Brunswick). **Amenities:** Tour desk; car-rental desk; coin-op laundry. *In room:* TV (in some).

## IN ST. KILDA

**Fountain Terrace** ★★ *Finds* Built in 1880, Fountain Terrace has been lovingly restored to its former glory by Penny and Heikki Minkkinen. This boutique guesthouse has real character and is a wonderful alternative to traditional city hotels. It's on a tree-lined street just a few minutes walk from the sea and to the many restaurants on Fitzroy and Acland streets. It's very classy inside with comfortable communal areas, including a sunny drawing room where breakfast is served at an antique refectory

table. The rooms, which are named after famous Australian writers, artists, and pioneers, have all those classic old-fashioned hallmarks of a historical house, including nice prints on the walls and old fireplaces. Each one is a real individual, so it's well worth while checking out the pictures on their website.

28 Mary St. (parallel to Fitzroy St.), St. Kilda West, Melbourne, VIC 3182. ✆ **03/9593 8123.** Fax 03/9593 8696. www.fountainterrace.com.au. 7 units. A$165–A$235 (US$132–US$188) double. Rates include breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. Tram: 96, 16, 112, or St. Kilda. **Amenities:** Nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* TV, coffeemaker, hair dryer.

**Hotel Tolarno** ★ The quirky Hotel Tolarno is right in the middle of St. Kilda's cafe and restaurant strip, and a long stone's throw away from the beach. Rich red carpets bedeck the corridors throughout the 1950s and 1960s retro-style building. Rooms vary, but all are modern and nice. The most popular, the deluxe doubles, are in the front of the building and have balconies overlooking the main street. They are larger than the standard rooms. Superior doubles come with a microwave and two have Japanese baths. Suites come with a separate kitchen and lounge. Suites don't have balconies, though some have Jacuzzis.

42 Fitzroy St., St. Kilda, Melbourne, VIC 3182. ✆ **1800/620 363** in Australia, or 03/9537 0200. Fax 03/9534 7800. www.hoteltolarno.com.au. 31 units. A$115 (US$92) standard double; A$125 (US$100) deluxe double; A$145 (US$116) superior double; A$180–A$200 (US$144–US$160) suite for up to 4. Extra person A$20 (US$16). AE, DC, MC, V. On-street parking. Tram: 16 from Swanston St.; 96 from Flinders St. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; 4 lit tennis courts; bike rental; concierge; tour desk; car-rental desk; room service; massage; babysitting; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, kitchen/kitchenette (only in suites), fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

**Olembia Private Hotel** This sprawling Edwardian house, built in 1922, is set back from a busy street behind a leafy courtyard. It's popular with tourists, business travelers, and young families; everyone gets together for frequent video nights, wine-and-cheese parties, and barbecues. The rooms are simply furnished, with little more than a double bed or two singles, a desk, a hand basin, and a wardrobe. Dorm rooms have between three and six beds. Guests share six bathrooms. There's a very comfortable sitting room and a courtyard area with barbecues. The Olembia is near St. Kilda beach and the restaurants lining Acland Street.

96 Barkly St., St. Kilda, Melbourne, VIC 3182. ✆ **03/9537 1412.** Fax 03/9537 1600. www.olembia.com.au. 23 units, none with bathroom. A$75 (US$60) double; A$90 (US$72) triple; A$24 (US$19) bed in dorm room. AE, MC, V. Free parking. Tram: 96 from Bourke St. to stop 138. **Amenities:** Bike rental; coin-op laundry; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* No phone.

### IN SOUTH YARRA

**Hotel Claremont** The high ceilings and the mosaic tiles in the lobby welcome visitors into this old-world hotel. It's an attractive place, though sparsely furnished. The AAA-rated three-star rooms are comfortable enough; each comes with either a double or a single bed. There is no elevator in this three-story building with 72 stairs, so it could be a bad choice for travelers with disabilities. Internet access is available.

189 Toorak Rd., South Yarra, Melbourne, VIC 3141. ✆ **1300/301 630** in Australia, or 03/9826 8000. Fax 03/9827 8652. www.hotelclaremont.com. 80 units, none with bathroom. A$78 (US$62) double; A$30 (US$24) dorm (6 beds). Extra person A$20 (US$16). Children stay free in parent's room. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Street parking. **Amenities:** Coin-op laundry; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* TV.

## 4 Where to Dine

Melbourne's ethnically diverse population ensures a healthy selection of international cooking styles. Chinatown, in the city center, is a fabulous hunting ground for Chinese, Malaysian, Thai, Indonesian, Japanese, and Vietnamese fare, often at bargain

prices. Carlton has plenty of Italian cuisine, but the outdoor restaurants on Lygon Street aim at tourists and can be overpriced and disappointing; avoid them. Richmond is crammed with Greek and Vietnamese restaurants, and Fitzroy has cheap Asian, Turkish, Mediterranean, and vegetarian food. To see and be seen, head to Chapel Street or Toorak Road in South Yarra, or to St. Kilda, where you can join the throng of Melbournians dining along Fitzroy and Acland streets. Most of the cheaper places in Melbourne are BYO (bring your own wine or beer). Smoking is not allowed in cafes and restaurants, so please think twice before offending both staff and fellow patrons.

## IN THE CITY CENTER

**Bamboo House** ★ NORTHERN REGIONAL CHINESE/CANTONESE Try this place. It's esteemed by both the Chinese community and local business big shots. The service is a pleasure, and the food—especially chicken with shallot sauce—is worth writing home about. The waiters are eager to help you construct a feast from the myriad Cantonese and northern Chinese dishes. (Don't leave without a taste of the duck in plum sauce!) Other popular dishes include pan-fried dumplings, spring onion pancakes, and the signature dish, Szechuan smoked duck.

47 Little Bourke St. ✆ **03/9662 1565.** Reservations recommended. Main courses A$20–A$28 (US$16–US$22). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Fri noon–3pm; Mon–Sat 5:30–11pm; Sun 5:30–10pm.

**Café Segovia** ★★ *Finds* CAFE Café Segovia is one of the most atmospheric cafes in Australia, with a sensual interior reminiscent of Spain. Seating is also available outside in the arcade, but you'll have to come early at lunchtime to nab a chair. It serves typical cafe food, such as focaccia, cakes, and light meals. There's live music Thursday and Friday.

33 Block Arcade. ✆ **03/9650 2373.** Main courses A$8–A$13 (US$6.40–US$10). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 7:30am–11pm; Sat 8am–6pm; Sun 9am–5pm.

**Chocolate Buddha** NOODLES This place offers mostly organic produce, including some organic wines. Based generally on Japanese-inspired noodle, ramen, and soba dishes to which the kitchen adds meat, chicken, or seafood, it's casual yet particularly satisfying dining. The food is creative, and the view across the square to the Yarra River and Southbank is a delight at dusk.

Federation Sq., corner of Flinders and Swanson sts. ✆ **03/9654 5688.** Main courses A$13–A$17 (US$10–US$14). AE, MC, V. Daily noon–10:30pm.

**Hopetoun Tearooms** ★ CAFE The first cup of coffee served in this Melbourne institution left the pot in 1892. It's very civilized, with green-and-white Regency wallpaper and marble tables. The cakes are very good. Scones, croissants, and grilled food are also available. A minimum charge of A$5 (US$4) per person applies from noon to 2pm.

Shops 1 and 2, Block Arcade, 280–282 Collins St. ✆/fax **03/9650 2777.** Main courses A$4.50–A$8.50 (US$3.60–US$6.80); sandwiches A$4.50–A$6.50 (US$3.60–US$5.20); focaccia A$7–A$8.50 (US$5.60–US$6.80). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Thurs 8:30am–5pm; Fri 8:30am–6pm; Sat 10am–3:30pm.

**Il Solito Posto** NORTHERN ITALIAN This belowground restaurant consists of two parts. The casual bistro has a blackboard menu offering good pastas, soups, and salads. Then there's the sharper and more upmarket trattoria, with its a la carte menu offering the likes of steak, fish, and veal dishes. The coffee is excellent, too.

113 Collins St., basement (enter through George Parade). ✆ **03/9654 4466.** Reservations recommended. Main courses A$15–A$17 (US$12–US$14) in bistro, A$25–A$33 (US$20–US$26) in trattoria. AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 7:30am–1am; Sat 9am–1am. Closed late Dec to early Jan.

**Irish Times** IRISH/MODERN AUSTRALIAN An Irish bar more authentic than most, the character-filled Irish Times serves up generous portions and Guinness on tap. Popular dishes include warm chicken salad, mussels in creamy broth, Caesar salad, and Irish dishes such as "boxty"—patties of mashed potato, leek, and onion with tomato relish. A live band plays Thursday and Friday at 9:30pm and Saturday at 10:30pm.

427 Little Collins St. ✆ **03/9642 1699.** Reservations recommended. Main courses A$10–A$25 (US$8–US$20). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 5pm–midnight; Sat 5pm–3am.

**Nudel Bar** NOODLES A favorite with city slickers, the Nudel Bar serves a variety of noodle dishes to diners at the crowded tables and bar. Examples include cold spicy green tea noodles and *mee goring* (a noodle dish with peanuts and, here, often chicken). Sticky rice pudding is a favorite for dessert.

76 Bourke St. ✆ **03/9662 9100.** Reservations recommended Fri–Sat night. Main courses A$13–A$18 (US$10–US$14). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 11am–10:30pm; Sat 11am–11pm; Sun 4–10:30pm.

**Sheni's Curries** SRI LANKAN This tiny (it seats 30), basic, very busy place offers a range of excellent-value, authentic Sri Lankan curries. You can dine here or take your lunch special to go. Choose from three vegetable dishes and a selection of meat and seafood options. All meals come with rice, three types of chutney, and a papadum. You can also buy extra items such as samosas and roti.

Shop 16, 161 Collins St. (corner of Flinders Lane and Russell St., opposite the entrance to the Grand Hyatt). ✆ **03/9654 3535.** Lunch specials A$5.50–A$12 (US$4.40–US$9.60). No credit cards. Mon–Fri 11am–4pm.

**Supper Inn** CANTONESE Head here if you get the Chinese-food munchies late at night. It's a friendly place with a mixed crowd of locals and tourists chowing down on such dishes as steaming bowls of *congee* (rice-based porridge), barbecued suckling pig, mud crab, or stuffed scallops. Everything here is the real thing!

15 Celestial Ave. ✆/fax **03/9663 4759.** Reservations recommended. Main courses A$10–A$15 (US$8–US$12). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 5:30pm–2:30am.

### WORTH A SPLURGE

**Koko** ★★ JAPANESE Though you'll find plenty of Japanese sushi and noodle bars around Chinatown, there's nothing quite like raw fish with a bit of panache. A visit to Crown Casino Entertainment Complex can be a memorable experience in itself, but stop off here and you'll wish you could remember these tastes forever. The restaurant has contemporary-traditional decor, with a goldfish pond in the center of the main dining room and wonderful views over the city. There are separate *teppanyaki* grills and screened tatami rooms where you sit on the matted floor. If you can manage boiled eel with rice, go for it. Otherwise, *yaki udon,* made with roast chicken, duck, prawns, and rare beef, is popular. A selection of 10 different sakes helps digestion.

Level 3, Crown Towers, Southbank. ✆ **03/9292 6886.** Reservations required. Main courses A$27–A$32 (US$22–US$26). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily noon–2:30pm and 6–10:30pm.

## CARLTON

**Brunetti** ★ TRATTORIA/PASTICCERIA For a real Italian experience, come here to sample excellent cakes, gelato, and coffee while gazing at the *trompe l'oeil* paintings and frescoes on the walls. The authentic lunch dishes are also worth sampling. The best thing this side of Rome.

198–204 Faraday St., Carlton. ✆ **03/9347 2801.** Main courses A$12–A$25 (US$9.60–US$20). Cafe dishes A$3–A$8 (US$2.40–US$6.40). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 7am–10:30pm; Sat 8am–10:30pm. Tram: 1, 15, 21, or 22 traveling north on Swanston St.

Bamboo House 3
Brunetti 2
Café Segovia 9
Chocolate Buddha 12
Hopetoun Tearooms 8
Il Solito Posto 6
Irish Times 10
Kanpai 14
Koko 11
Mario's 2
Meccabah 15
Nudel Bar 4
Shakahari 1
Sheni's Curries 7
Supper Inn 5
Tandoor Indian Restaurant 13
Victoria
Melbourne
0 250 Mi
0 250 Km
To Melbourne Zoo
To Carlton
To Fitzroy
To East Melbourne
To Airport (20 km)
To St. Kilda, South Melbourne
To South Yarra
CARLTON GARDENS
FLAGSTAFF GARDENS
FITZROY GARDENS
TREASURY GARDENS
ALEXANDRA GARDENS
QUEEN VICTORIA GARDENS
BIRRARUNG MARR
CHINATOWN
CITY CENTER
Yarra River
Museum of Victoria
Melbourne Central
Houses of Parliament
St. Patrick's Cathedral
Princess Theatre
David Jones
Myer Store
General Post Office
City Square
Federation Square
Princes Bridge
Flinders St. Railway Station
Spencer St. Interstate Railway Station
Queens Bridge
Kings Bridge
Melbourne Cricket Ground
Melbourne Park National Tennis Centre
Victoria Parade
Albert St.
Gisborne St.
Nicholson St.
Spring St.
Exhibition St.
Russell St.
Swanston St.
Elizabeth St.
Queen St.
Lonsdale St.
Little Lonsdale St.
Latrobe St.
Franklin St.
A'Beckett St.
Peel St.
Dudley St.
Bourke St.
Little Bourke St.
Little Collins St.
Collins St.
Flinders Lane
Market St.
William St.
King St.
Spencer St.
Queensbridge St.
Southgate
City Rd.
St. Kilda Rd.
Batman Ave.
Wellington Parade South
Landsdowne St.
Macarthur St.
Church
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### Tips The Staff of Life

The aroma of fresh bread attracts you to **Babka Bakery,** a Russian-style cafe-bakery run by a delightful gaggle of girls. Come for breakfast or a light lunch of eggs on fresh sourdough, quiches, tarts, and brioches. Or perhaps try the homemade borscht. It's at 358 Brunswick St. in Fitzroy (✆ **03/9416 0091**).

**Shakahari** VEGETARIAN Good vegetarian food isn't just a meal without meat; it's a creation in its own right. Shakahari assures you of creative fare that's not at all bland. The large restaurant is quite low-key, but the service can be a bit inconsistent. Satay samsara (skewered, lightly fried vegetables and tofu pieces with peanut dip) is a winner, as is couscous, served in a vast earthenware pot. Also available are curries, croquettes, tempura avocado, and veggie burgers (on a plate with salad, not in a bun).

201–203 Faraday St., Carlton. ✆ **03/9347 3848.** Main courses A$15 (US$12). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Sat noon–3:30pm; Sun–Thurs 6–9:30pm; Fri–Sat 6–10:30pm. Tram: 1, 15, 21, or 22 traveling north along Swanston St.

## FITZROY

**Mario's** ITALIAN This place has ambience, groovy '60s decor, great coffee, and impeccable professional service. Offerings include a varied range of pastas and cakes. Breakfast is served all day. The art on the wall, all by local artists, is always interesting and for sale, too.

303 Brunswick St., Fitzroy. ✆ **03/9417 3343.** Main courses A$12–A$18 (US$9.60–US$14). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 7am–10:30pm; Sat 8am–10:30pm. Tram: 112 from Swanston St., stop 16.

## SEASIDE DINING IN ST. KILDA

**Chinta Blues** MALAYSIAN Head to this very popular eatery if you're looking for simple, satisfying food with a healthy touch of spice. The big sellers are *laksa, mei goreng,* chicken curry, sambal spinach, and a chicken dish called *ayam* blues. Lots of noodles, too. It's very busy, especially at lunch.

6 Acland St., St. Kilda. ✆ **03/9534 9233.** Reservations recommended. Main courses A$10–A$19 (US$8–US$15). AE, MC, V. Mon–Sat noon–2:30pm; Mon–Wed 6–10pm; Thurs–Sat 6–10:45pm; Sun noon–9:45pm. Tram: 16 from Swanston St. or 96 from Bourke St.

**La Porchetta Pizza Restaurant** Value PIZZA This busy, large, very noisy pizza joint is a good deal. It offers some 22 different pizzas, with the largest just big enough to fill two. A range of pasta dishes, chicken, seafood, veal, and steaks are also on the menu. The pace here means it's not for the faint-hearted.

80 Acland St., St. Kilda. ✆ **03/9534 1888.** Main courses A$5–A$14 (US$4–US$11); pizzas A$6–A$7.80 (US$4.80–US$6.25); pastas A$6–A$9 (US$4.80–US$7.20). No credit cards. Sun–Thurs 11am–midnight; Fri–Sat 11am–2am. Tram: 16 from Swanston St. or 96 from Bourke St.

## WORTH A SPLURGE

**Donovans** ★★ MODERN MEDITERRANEAN Donovans is so near the sea you expect the fish to jump through the door and onto the plate—and it does serve extremely fresh seafood. The restaurant is all higgledy-piggledy and charming, with lots of cushions, a log fire, and the sounds of jazz and breakers on the beach. The menu includes a mind-boggling array of dishes, many big enough for two. Chef Robert Castellani's trademarks include steamed mussels, linguini with seafood, and stuffed squid. The bar is perfect for watching the sun go down.

## Where to Stay & Dine in St. Kilda

40 Jacka Blvd., St. Kilda. ✆ **03/9534 8221.** Reservations recommended. Main courses A$23–A$36 (US$18–US$29). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily noon–10:30pm. Tram: 12 from Collins St., 16 from Swanston St., 94 or 96 from Bourke St.

## MORE ETHNIC EATS IN SOUTH YARRA

**Kanpai** JAPANESE You have to make reservations well in advance to get a seat at this popular restaurant on the Chapel Street restaurant strip. The sushi and sashimi dishes are very fresh, and the miso soup is well worth plundering with your chopsticks. There's also a good vegetarian selection.

569 Chapel St., South Yarra. ✆ **03/9827 4379.** Reservations recommended. Main courses A$12–A$34 (US$9.60–US$27). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily noon–11pm. Tram: 6, 8, or 72 from Swanston St.

**Tandoor Indian Restaurant** ★ INDIAN This basic Indian restaurant was far less crowded than many of the others on the Chapel Street strip when I last visited, and all I can say is that the in crowd didn't know what they were missing. The curries here are rich and spicy, and the vegetarian *paneer*-butter *masala* and cheese *kofta* are some of the best I've tasted in Australia. Some dishes, such as crab *masala* curry, are truly inspirational. The main courses are quite large, so you'll probably not need a first course, but I highly recommend side dishes of naan bread (one per person) and cucumber *raita* to cool the palate.

517 Chapel St., South Yarra. ✆ **03/9827 8247.** Reservations recommended Fri–Sat night. Main courses A$11–A$22 (US$8.80–US$18). AE, DC, MC, V. Tues–Fri and Sun noon–2:30pm; daily 6–11pm. Tram: 6, 8, or 72 from Swanston St.

### DOCKLANDS

**Meccabah** ★★ *Finds* *Kids* MIDDLE EASTERN Overlooking the Yarra River in the up-and-coming waterside precinct of Docklands, and a short trip from the city center, is this excellent Middle Eastern restaurant. You could go for a main course, such as lamb with preserved lemon, green olives, and *harissa* (a chile-based sauce), but I recommend tucking into the meze plates—little dishes of gorgeous delicacies. Expect the likes of pastry filled with Middle Eastern cheeses or Moroccan chicken, sweet potato falafels with tahini sauce, and spicy Turkish *kofte* with yogurt (I've tried all of them). Whatever you choose, you'll be really impressed. There's also an interesting range of Turkish pizzas here, too, such as one with roast pumpkin, chile, pomegranate jam, and feta cheese; or with sardine, caramelized onion, roast tomato, and olives. The wine list is really good and not that pricy either. Highly recommended. You could cruise up the river to get here with Melbourne River Cruises (see the "Getting Around" section, earlier in this chapter).

55 NewQuay Promenade, Docklands. ✆ **03/9642 1300.** Reservations recommended. Main courses A$16–A$20 (US$13–US$16); meze plates A$11 (US$8.80). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11am–11pm. Tram: 30 or 48 from Latrobe or Swanston sts.

## 5 Seeing the Sights

Melbourne's attractions may not have quite the fame as some of Sydney's, but visitors come here to experience the contrasts of old-world architecture and the exciting feel of a truly multicultural city.

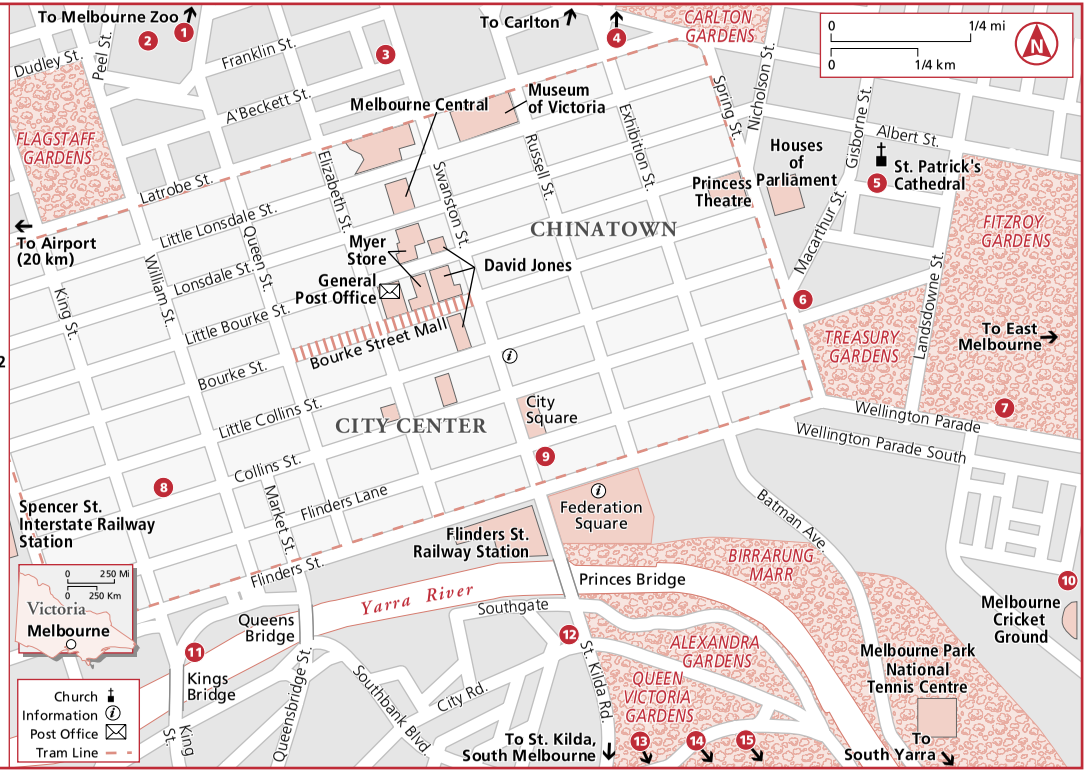
### THE TOP ATTRACTIONS

**Federation Square** ★★ Touted as "Melbourne's civic and cultural hub for the 21st century," Federation Square is a conglomerate of attractions centered on wacky architecture and a large open piazza-type area cobbled with misshapen paving. Here you'll find the **National Gallery of Victoria's Ian Potter Centre** (p. 552), the **Australian Centre for the Moving Image (ACMI),** and a one-stop visitor center (see "Visitor Information," earlier in this chapter). The three-level National Gallery of Victoria building contains the largest collection of Australian art in the country, including works by Sidney Nolan, Russell Drysdale, and Tom Roberts, as well as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. The gallery is a major focus for art festivals and special events. Numerous cafes and coffee shops operate throughout the precinct. ACMI (✆ **03/8663 2583;** www.acmi.net.au) has two state-of-the-art cinemas and large areas where visitors can view movies, videos, and digital media. It's worth visiting the square

*Tips* **A Few Sightseeing Suggestions**

Much of Melbourne's appeal comes from soaking up the atmosphere on a walk around the city. If you have time to see only one major attraction, by all means make it the **Melbourne Zoo.** Other top-of-the-list sights include **Federation Square,** the **National Gallery of Victoria,** and the **Royal Botanic Gardens.** If you have time, head to **Phillip Island** to see the fairy penguins.

- Australian Gallery of Sport **10**
- Cook's Cottage **7**
- Gold Treasury Museum **6**
- IMAX Theatre **4**
- Melbourne Aquarium **11**
- Melbourne Museum **4**
- Melbourne Observation Deck **8**
- Melbourne Zoo **1**
- National Gallery of Victoria **13**
- Old Melbourne Gaol **3**
- Queen Victoria Markets **2**
- Royal Botanic Gardens **15**
- Shrine of Remembrance **14**
- St. Patrick's Cathedral **5**
- St. Paul's Cathedral **9**
- Victorian Arts Centre **12**



just to see the extraordinary architecture, made up of strangely reflective geometrical designs, and the glassed atrium. Lots of events happen in the square's 450-seat amphitheater, including theatrical performances and free concerts. Other events take place on the plaza and along the banks of the Yarra River.

Flinders St. to the Yarra River (running north-south; to the left, facing Flinders St. Railway Station). www.federationsquare.com.au. Free admission; charges for some special events and exhibitions. Outdoor spaces open 24 hr. Tram: City Circle.

**Gold Treasury Museum** Designed by the architect J. J. Clarke (when he was only 19) and built in 1857, the Old Treasury Building is an imposing neoclassical sandstone structure that once housed precious metal from the Ballarat and Bendigo gold rushes. The gold was stored in eight thick-walled vaults underground and protected by iron bars. The "Built on Gold" exhibition in the vaults is a high-tech multimedia show featuring videos and displays showing how the gold was dug up, sold, transported, and housed. In the basement are the restored quarters of a caretaker who lived there from 1916 to 1928. The ground floor holds the "Melbourne: A City Built on Gold" display, which shows how Melbourne was built using the profits from the gold rushes. A temporary exhibition gallery on the premises features anything from prints to gold-thread embroidery. Allow about 1 hour.

Old Treasury Building, Spring St. (top of Collins St.). ✆ **03/9651 2233.** Admission A$7 (US$5.60) adults, A$3.50 (US$2.80) children, A$18 (US$14) families. Mon–Fri 9am–5pm; weekends and public holidays 10am–4pm. Bus: City Explorer.

**The Ian Potter Centre: National Gallery of Victoria Australia** ★ This fascinating gallery, featuring 20 rooms dedicated to Australian art, opened in 2002 in the heart of Federation Square. Some 20,000 objects are stored here, but only about 800 are on display at any one time. Aboriginal art and colonial art collections are the centerpieces of the gallery, but you will find modern paintings here, too. Temporary exhibitions include anything from ceramics to shoes. There are also a couple of cafes.

Federation Sq. (runs north-south from Flinders St. to the Yarra River). ✆ **03/8662 1555.** www.ngv.vic.gov.au/ngvaustralia. Free admission. Mon–Thurs 10am–5pm; Fri 10am–9pm; Sat–Sun 10am–6pm. Bus: City Explorer.

**IMAX Theatre** *Kids* This eight-story movie screen rivals the world's largest screen, at Sydney's Darling Harbour. Recent subjects have been outer space, the African Serengeti, and the deep oceans.

Melbourne Museum Complex, Rathdowne St., Carlton. ✆ **03/9663 5454.** www.imax.com.au. Admission from A$14 (US$11) adults, A$9.95 (US$7.95) children. Daily 10am–10pm. Tram: 1 or 22 from Swanston St.

**Melbourne Aquarium** *Overrated* Opened in early 2000, the Melbourne Aquarium stretches over three levels and features a Barrier Reef–type exhibit, some interesting jellyfish displays, and an enormous walk-through tank with larger fish, sharks, and rays. However, it's pretty disappointing compared with the ones in Sydney and doesn't live up to the hype. Allow 30 minutes.

Corner of Queens Wharf Rd. and Kings St., opposite Crown Casino. ✆ **03/9620 0999.** www.melbourneaquarium.com.au. Admission A$21 (US$17) adults, A$11 (US$8.80) children under 16, A$49 (US$39) families. Daily 9:30am–6pm. Tram: City Circle.

**Melbourne Museum** ★★ *Kids* This museum opposite the 19th-century Royal Exhibition Buildings is Australia's largest and in my mind one of the most interesting. Some of the highlights include a blue whale skeleton (you can't miss it), an indoor rainforest, and a brilliant insect and butterfly collection with lots of real-life exhibits,

including cockroaches, ant colonies, and huge spiders. Apart from that there are interactive exhibits and science displays; Bunjikata, the award-winning Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander center; and bits and pieces of social history, including a stuffed race horse called Phar Lap. Check out the brightly colored Children's Gallery, which will bring hours of enjoyment to the little ones. A big thumb's up! Allow 2 hours.

11 Nicholson St., Carlton. ✆ **13 11 02** in Australia. www.melbourne.museum.vic.gov.au. Admission A$6 (US$4.80) adults; free for children under 16. Daily 10am–5pm. Tram: 86 or 96 to the Museum and Royal Exhibition Building tram stop at the corner of Nicholson and Gertrude sts., or the free City Circle Tram to Carlton Gardens.

**Melbourne Observation Deck** From the 55th floor, near the top of the tallest building in the Southern Hemisphere, you get 360-degree views of all Melbourne and beyond. See if you can spot the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG) and the Crown Casino. A 20-minute film shows you what you're looking at, but you might as well just take a map up and figure it out for yourself. Of interest are the displays telling about life in Melbourne, past and present. There's a cafe here, too. Allow 1 hour.

Rialto Building, Collins St. (between William and King sts.). ✆ **03/9629 8222.** www.melbournedeck.com.au. Admission A$12 (US$9.60) adults, A$7 (US$5.60) children, A$32 (US$26) families. Daily 10am–11pm. Parking underneath. Tram: Any tram on Collins St.

**Melbourne Zoo** ★★ *Kids* This place is a must-see. Built in 1862, it's the oldest zoo in the world, and among the best. There are some 3,000 animals here, including the ever-popular kangaroos, wallabies, echidnas, koalas, wombats, and platypuses. Rather than being locked in cages, most animals are in almost natural surroundings or well-tended gardens. Don't miss the butterfly house, with its thousands of colorful occupants flying around; the free-flight aviary; the lowland gorilla exhibit; and the treetop monkey displays. Allow at least 1 hour if you just want to see the Australian natives, and around 2½ hours for the whole zoo.

Elliott Ave., Parkville. ✆ **03/9285 9300.** www.zoo.org.au. Admission A$20 (US$16) adults, A$9.50 (US$7.60) children under 14, A$50 (US$40) families. Daily 9am–5pm. Free guided tours daily; go to the Friends of the Zoo office to arrange tours. Free parking. Tram: 55 going north on William St. to stop 25; 19 from Elizabeth St. to stop 16 (then a short walk to your left, following signposts). Train: Royal Park Station.

**National Gallery of Victoria International** ★ Opened to critical acclaim in late 2003, the NGV International is a showcase for Australia's finest collections of international art. There are four Gainsboroughs and four Constables here, as well as paintings by the likes of Bonnard, Delacroix, Van Dyck, El Greco, Monet, Manet, Magritte, and Rembrandt. Architecturally, the building is a masterpiece, with high ceilings, fabulous lighting, and great open spaces.

180 St. Kilda Rd. ✆ **03/8620 2222.** www.ngv.vic.gov.au/ngvinternational. Free admission to general collection; fees for some temporary exhibitions. Daily 10am–5pm. Tram: 1, 3, 5, 6, 8, 16, 22, 25, 64, 67, or 72 from Swanston St. to Victorian Arts Centre stop (ask driver).

**Old Melbourne Gaol** ★★ *Finds* I love this cramped former prison, with its tiny cells and spooky collection of death masks and artifacts of 19th-century prison life. Some 135 hangings took place here, including that of notorious bandit (and Australian hero) Ned Kelly, in 1880. The scaffold where he was hanged is still in place, and his gun, as well as a suit of armor used by a member of his gang, is on display. The jail closed in 1929. Profiles of former prisoners give a fabulous perspective of what it was like to be locked up here. Chilling night tours run every Sunday and Wednesday (call ahead to check the schedule). They cost A$19 (US$15) for adults,

A$11 (US$8.80) for children, and A$46 (US$37) for families; the tour is not recommended for children under 12. Allow 1 hour or more.

Russell St. ✆ **03/9663 7228.** Admission A$13 (US$10) adults, A$7.50 (US$6) children, A$34 (US$27) families. Daily 9:30am–4:30pm. Tram: City Circle tram to corner of Russell and Latrobe sts.

**Queen Victoria Market** ★ This Melbourne institution covers several blocks. There are hundreds of indoor and outdoor stalls, where you can find anything from live rabbits to bargain clothes. The market can get cramped, and there's a lot of junk to sort through, but you'll get a real taste of Melbourne and its ethnic mix. Look out for the interesting delicatessen section and cheap eateries. Allow at least an hour.

The 2-hour **Foodies Dream Tour** of the market explores its food and heritage. It departs Tuesday, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday at 10am and costs A$22 (US$18) for adults and A$15 (US$12) for children under 15, including sampling. Well-known chefs give cooking classes, costing A$65 (US$52) per session. Call ✆ **03/9320 5835** for reservations.

Between Peel, Victoria, Elizabeth, and Therry sts. on the northern edge of the city center. ✆ **03/9269 5835.** www.qvm.com.au. Tues–Thurs 6am–2pm; Fri 6am–6pm; Sat 6am–3pm; Sun 9am–4pm. Food stalls closed Sun. Tram: Any tram traveling north along William St. or Elizabeth St.

**Rippon Lea House Museum & Historic Garden** This grand Victorian house, 8km (5 miles) from the city center, is worth a visit to get a feel for old-money Melbourne. Socialite Sir Frederick Thomas Sargood built Rippon Lea House, which has dozens of rooms, between 1868 and 1903; a pool and ballroom were added in the 1930s. Though the Romanesque architecture is interesting (note the stained glass and polychrome brickwork), the real attraction is the surrounding 5.3 hectares (13 acres) of landscaped gardens, which include a conservatory, a lake, a lookout tower, an orchard, and extensive flowerbeds and shrubbery. If you're here on a weekend, a public holiday, or during school vacations, you might like to drop into the tearoom, which is open from 11am to 4pm. Allow 2 hours.

192 Hotham St., Elsternwick. ✆ **03/9523 6095.** Admission A$9 (US$7.20) adults, A$5 (US$4) children 5–16, A$20 (US$16) families. Daily 10am–5pm (house closes at 4:45pm). Daily guided tours of house every half-hour 10:30am–4pm; tour of estate 2pm. Closed Good Friday and Dec 25. Tram: 67 to stop 40, then walk up Hotham St. Bus: 216/219 from Bourke and Queen sts. in the city to stop 4. Train: Sandringham Line from Flinders St. Station to Rippon Lea Station.

**State Houses of Parliament** Now the home of the Victorian Parliament, this imposing monument to Victorian (as in Queen Victoria) architecture at the top of a run of sandstone steps was built in 1856. During the Australian Federation (1900–27), it was used as the National Parliament; it's also known as Parliament House. When the State Government is in session—generally on Tuesday afternoon and all day Wednesday and Thursday between March and July, and again between August and November (there's a break between sessions)—you can view the proceedings from the public gallery. However, you should ring ahead and check, as sitting times do vary. During non-sitting times, both the extremely opulent Upper House and the less ornate Lower House chambers are open to the public. Allow 30 minutes.

Spring St. ✆ **03/9651 8568** or 03/9651 8569. www.parliament.vic.gov.au. Free guided tours Mon–Fri 10, 11am, noon, 2, 3, and 3:45pm when Parliament is not in session. Mon–Fri 9am–5pm.

**St. Patrick's Cathedral** Though lacking the intricacy of design of St. Paul's (see below), Roman Catholic St. Patrick's is another interesting Gothic Revival construction with exceptional stained-glass windows. Built between 1858 and 1940 (consecrated in

1897), St. Patrick's was closely associated with immigrants from Ireland escaping the mid-19th-century potato famine. In the courtyard out front is a statue of the Irish patriot Daniel O'Connell. Allow 15 minutes.

Cathedral Place. ✆ **03/9662 2233.** Mon–Fri 6:30am–6pm; Sat–Sun 7:15am–7:30pm.

**St. Paul's Cathedral** Built from 1880 to 1892 from the designs of William Butterfield, a famous English Gothic Revival architect, Anglican St. Paul's Cathedral is noteworthy for its highly decorative interior and the English organ built by T. S. Lewis. Step inside to see gold mosaics on walls, Victorian tessellated tiles on the floors, intricate woodcarvings, and stained-glass windows. The cathedral sports the second-highest spire (98m/321 ft.) in the Anglican Communion. A boys' choir sings at 5:10pm Monday through Friday during school times, and on Sunday at 10:30am and 6pm. Outside is a statue of Matthew Flinders, who between 1801 and 1803 became the first sailor to navigate the Australian mainland. Allow 15 minutes.

Flinders and Swanston sts. ✆ **03/9650 3791.** Daily 7:30am–6pm. Services Sun 8, 9, and 10:30am; Eucharist 6pm. Choral evensong Mon–Fri 7:45am, 12:15, and 5:10pm. Cathedral shop daily 10am–4pm.

## PARKS & GARDENS

**Birrarung Marr,** along the Yarra River east of Federation Square on Batman Avenue (✆ **03/9658 9658;** www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/parks), is Melbourne's first new major parkland in more than 100 years; it opened in 2002. *Birrarung* means "river of mists" in the Woiwurrung language of the Wurundjeri people who originally inhabited the area; *marr* equates with the side of the river. Wide, open spaces and large, sculptured terraces were designed to host some of Melbourne's best events and festivals throughout the year, and the terraces give way to spectacular views of the City, Southbank, King's Domain, and the Yarra River.

The **Royal Botanic Gardens** ★★, 2km (1¼ miles) south of the city on Birdwood Avenue, off St. Kilda Road (✆ **03/9252 2300;** www.rbg.vic.gov.au), are the best gardens in Australia and well worth a few hours of wandering. More than 40 hectares (99 acres) are lush and blooming with more than 12,000 plant species from all over the world. Don't miss a visit to the oldest part of the garden, the Tennyson Lawn, with its 120-year-old English elm trees. Other special corners include a fern gully, camellia gardens, an herb garden, rainforests packed with fruit bats, and ponds full of ducks and black swans. You can wander at your own pace or take one of the free guided walks that leave the National Herbarium Building, F Gate, Sunday through Friday at 11am and noon. Bring snacks and your picnic blanket to Shakespeare in the Park, a popular summer event. Performances are in January and February, and tickets cost around A$30 (US$24). Call ✆ **03/9252 2300** for details. The gardens are open daily November through March from 7:30am to 8:30pm; April, September, and October from 7:30am to 6pm; and May through August from 7:30am to 5:30pm. Admission is free. To get there, catch the tram on Route 8, traveling south, and get off at stop 21. Allow 2 to 4 hours.

Nearby, in King's Domain, take a look at Victoria's first Government House, **Latrobe's Cottage** (✆ **03/9654 5528**). It was built in England and transported to Australia brick by brick in 1836. Admission is A$2 (US$1.60) per person. The cottage is open from 11am to 4pm Monday, Wednesday, Saturday, and Sunday. On the other side of Birdwood Avenue is the **Shrine of Remembrance,** a memorial to the servicemen lost in Australia's wars. It's designed so that at 11am on Remembrance Day (Nov 11), a beam of sunlight hits the Stone of Remembrance in the Inner Shrine.

Note the eternal flame in the forecourt. King's Domain is stop 12 on the Route 15 tram traveling south along St. Kilda Road.

In Fitzroy Gardens, off Wellington Parade, is **Cooks' Cottage** (✆ **03/9419 4677**), which was moved to Melbourne from Great Ayton, in Yorkshire, England, in 1934 to mark Victoria's centennial. The cottage was built by the parents of Captain Cook, and today it provides the opportunity to learn about his voyages of discovery around the world. Inside, it's spartan and cramped, not unlike a ship's cabin. Admission is A$3.70 (US$2.95) for adults, A$1.80 (US$1.45) for children 5 to 15, and A$8.80 (US$7.05) for families. It's open daily from 9am to 5pm (until 5:30pm in summer). Also east of the central business district are the **Treasury Gardens.** Look for the memorial to John F. Kennedy near the lake. To reach Treasury Gardens and Fitzroy Gardens, take tram no. 75 traveling east along Flinders Street. Get off at stop 14 for Treasury Gardens or stop 14A for Fitzroy Gardens.

## 6 Enjoying the Great Outdoors or Catching an Aussie Rules Football Match

### OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES

**BALLOONING** **Melbourne by Balloon,** Balloon Sunrise Office, 41 Dover St., Richmond (✆ **03/9427 7596;** fax 03/9427 7597), offers flights over the city plus a champagne breakfast once you hit the ground. Dawn flights cost A$310 (US$248) for adults, and A$220 (US$176) for children under 12—but if they're under 1.2m (4 ft.) tall, they won't be able to see over the basket. Reservations are essential.

**BIKING** Extensive bicycle paths wind through the city and suburbs. For details on the 20 most popular routes, pick up a copy of *Melbourne Bike Tours,* published by **Bicycle Victoria** (✆ **03/9328 3000;** fax 03/9328 2288; www.bv.com.au), available at most local bookshops. Bicycle Victoria also runs several major cycling tours throughout the state every year.

You can rent a bike from **Hire a Bike** at St. Kilda Pier (✆ **03/9531 7403**); non-Australians must show their passports.

**GOLF** One of the best public golf courses in Australia is **Yarra Bend,** Yarra Bend Road, Fairfield (✆ **03/9481 3729**). Greens fees are A$21 (US$17) (Mon–Fri), A$22 (US$18) (Sat–Sun). Children pay A$10 (US$8) any day. Club rental is an extra A$25 (US$20) for a full set and A$12 (US$9.60) for a half set.

The exclusive **Royal Melbourne Golf Club,** in the suburb of Black Rock, 24km (15 miles) from the city center, is rated as one of the world's 10 best golf courses. It's open to members only, but if you belong to a top-notch golf club at home, you might be able to wheedle your way in.

For more information on golf in Victoria, contact the **Victorian Golf Association,** 15 Bardolph St., Burwood (✆ **03/9889 6731**).

**IN-LINE SKATING** The promenade in St. Kilda is the most popular place to strap on skates. You can rent them at **Rock'n 'n' Roll'n,** 11a Fitzroy St., St. Kilda (✆ **03/9525 3434**). The first hour is A$10 (US$8). Successive hours are less expensive.

**TENNIS** The venue for the Australian Open, the **Melbourne Park National Tennis Centre,** on Batman Avenue (✆ **03/9286 1244**), is a great place to play. When tournaments are not scheduled, its 22 outdoor courts (including the show courts) and four indoor courts are open to the public. You can rent courts Monday through Friday from 7am to 11pm, Saturday and Sunday from 9am to 6pm. Charges range from

### The XVII Commonwealth Games

From March 15 to March 26, 2006, Melbourne will host the XVII Commonwealth Games. It's billed as the largest event Melbourne has seen since the Olympics were held here in 1956. Some 4,500 athletes from 71 nations, which make up the British Commonwealth, are due to compete. Fourteen of the 16 sports will be held within a 3km (1¾-mile) radius of the city center, with the redeveloped Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG) holding both the opening and closing ceremonies and all the track and field events. Hotels will be booked solid, so if you are planning on visiting Melbourne, avoid this time—unless of course you are coming to the games and book early enough. For general information on the Games, check out the official website, www.melbourne2006.com.au, or call ✆ **03/9613 2006.**

A$14 to A$30 (US$11–US$24) per hour, depending on the court and time of day (outdoor courts are cheapest). Show courts 1, 2, and 3 are for rent at the same prices. Racquets are available for A$3 (US$2.40).

## SPECTATOR SPORTS

**CAR RACING** The annual **Australian Formula One Grand Prix** takes place in early March at Albert Park, about 3km (2 miles) from central Melbourne. Call Ticketmaster (✆ **13 61 22** in Australia; www.ticketmaster7.com) or the Grand Prix Hotline (✆ **13 16 41** in Australia, or 03/9258 7100) for information on tickets, accommodations, and airfares. Also check out the Grand Prix's website at www.grandprix.com.au.

**CRICKET** From October through March, cricket's the name of the game in Melbourne. The **Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG),** Brunton Avenue, Yarra Park, Jolimont (✆ **03/9657 8879;** www.mcg.org.au), is perhaps Australia's most hallowed cricket field. The facility (the main stadium for the 1956 Melbourne Olympic Games) can accommodate 97,500 people. For the uninitiated, "one-day" games are the ones to look out for; "test" games take several days to complete. Buy tickets at the gate or in advance from **Ticketmaster** (✆ **13 61 00** in Australia; www.ticketmaster.com.au).

Tours of the MCG and its museum start every half-hour daily from 10am to 3pm. Tours cost A$10 (US$8) for adults, A$6 (US$4.80) for children, and A$25 (US$20) for families. The tour price includes admission to the Australian Gallery of Sport and the Olympic Museum, which are also at the MCG. They're open daily from 9:30am to 4:30pm. The Olympic Museum traces the development of the modern Olympics with individual display sections for each city. Also in the complex is a coffee shop that serves snacks and lunch.

**FOOTBALL** Melbourne's number-one sport is **Australian Rules Football**—or simply "the footy"—a skillful, often violent game the likes of which you've never seen (unless you have ESPN). Melbourne is home to 10 of the 16 Australian Football League (AFL) teams, with the others coming from Adelaide, Perth, Sydney, and Brisbane. The season starts on the third weekend in March and ends with the Grand Final on the last Saturday in September. The most accessible fields are at the Melbourne

Cricket Ground (take tram no. 75 along Wellington Parade) and the Optus Oval at Carlton (take tram no. 19 from Elizabeth St.). Tickets cost around A$16 (US$13) per person or A$30 (US$24) for a family. For game information, call **AFL Headquarters** (✆ **03/9643 1999**). Buy tickets through **Ticketmaster** (✆ **13 61 00** in Australia; www.ticketmaster7.com).

**HORSE RACING** The **Melbourne Cup,** on the first Tuesday in November, has been contested by the best of Australia's thoroughbreds (and a few from overseas) since 1861. Melbourne society puts on a show, dressing up for the occasion, and the entire nation stops in its tracks to at least tune in on TV.

The city has four race tracks: **Flemington** (which holds the Melbourne Cup), Epson Road, Flemington (✆ **03/9371 7171**); **Moonee Valley,** McPherson Street, Mooney Ponds (✆ **03/9373 2222**); **Caulfield,** Station Street, Caulfield (✆ **03/9257 7200**); and **Sandown,** Racecourse Drive, Springvale (✆ **03/9518 1300**). If you're staying in the city center, Flemington and Moonee Valley are the easiest to get to. Take tram no. 57 from Flinders Street to reach the Flemington racetrack, and catch tram no. 59 from Elizabeth Street to Moonee Valley.

**TENNIS** The **Australian Open,** one of the four Grand Slam events, is played during the last 2 weeks of January every year at the Melbourne Park National Tennis Centre, Batman Avenue (✆ **03/9286 1244**). Tickets go on sale in mid-October and are available through **Ticketek** (✆ **03/9299 9079**) and on the Open's website, www.ausopen.org. To get there, take a train from the Flinders Street Station at the bottom of Swanston Street (to Richmond Station) and catch the special Tennis Center tram from there.

## 7 Shopping

Ask almost any Melbournian to help you plan your time in the city, and he or she will advise you to shop till you drop. All Australia regards Melbourne as a shopping capital—it has everything, from fashion houses to major department stores and unusual souvenir shops. If you're coming from Sydney, I say save your money until you get to Melbourne, and then indulge!

Start at the magnificent city arcades, such as the **Block Arcade** (between Collins and Little Collins sts.), which has more than 30 shops, including the historic Hopetoun Tearooms (p. 545), and the **Royal Arcade** (stretching from Little Collins St. to the Bourke St. Mall). Then hit the courts and lanes around **Swanston Street** and the huge **Melbourne Central shopping complex** between Latrobe and Lonsdale streets.

Next, fan out across the city, taking in **Chapel Street** in South Yarra, for its Australian fashions, and **The Jam Factory,** 500 Chapel St., South Yarra (✆ **03/9826 0537**), which is a series of buildings with a range of shops and food outlets, including a branch of U.S.-based Borders bookstore, as well as 16 cinema screens. Get there on tram no. 8 or no. 72 from Swanston Street.

There's also **Toorak Road** in Toorak, for Gucci and other high-fashion names; **Bridge Road** in Richmond, for budget fashions; **Lygon Street** in Carlton, for Italian fashion, footwear, and accessories; and **Brunswick Street** in Fitzroy, for a more alternative scene.

Serious shoppers might like to contact **Shopping Spree Tours** (✆ **03/9596 6600**), a company that takes you to exclusive and alternative shopping venues, manufacturers,

and importers you wouldn't be likely to find by yourself. Tours depart Monday through Saturday at 8:30am and cost A$60 (US$48) per person, including lunch and a visit to the Melbourne Observation Deck.

## MELBOURNE SHOPPING FROM A TO Z

### ABORIGINAL CRAFTS

**The Aboriginal Gallery of the Dreaming** This place stocks an extensive range of acrylic dot paintings and represents more than 120 artists. Boomerangs, didgeridoos, pottery, jewelry, bark paintings, prints, books, and music are also available. 73–77 Bourke St. Mall. ✆ **03/9650 3277.**

**Original & Authentic Aboriginal Art** Stop here for original artworks, traditional bark paintings, and informative presentations. 90 Bourke St. ✆ **03/9663 5133.** www.authaboriginalart.com.au

### CRAFTS

An interesting arts-and-crafts market takes place on the Esplanade in St. Kilda on Sunday from 9am to 4pm. Take tram no. 16 from Swanston Street or no. 96 from Bourke Street.

**The Australian Geographic Shop** Head here for high-quality Australiana, including crafts, books, and various gadgets. Shop 130, Melbourne Central, 300 Lonsdale St. ✆ **03/9639 2478;** and Galleria Shopping Plaza, Little Collins St. ✆ **03/9670 5813.**

### DEPARTMENT STORES

**David Jones** Like Myer (see below), its direct competition, David Jones—or DJ's, as it's affectionately known—spans 2 blocks, separated into men's and women's stores, and offers similar goods. The men's fashions in particular leave a lot to be desired. 310 Bourke St. Mall. ✆ **03/9643 2222.**

**Myer** The grande dame of Melbourne's department stores has 12 floors of household goods, perfume, jewelry, and fashions stretching over 2 blocks. It's one of the largest stores in the world. The food section on the ground floor includes, among other things, good sushi. The clothes are better here than at David Jones. 314 Bourke St. Mall. ✆ **03/9661 1111.**

### FASHION

High-fashion boutiques line the eastern stretch of **Collins Street,** between the Grand Hyatt and the Hotel Sofitel, and **Chapel Street** in South Yarra. In addition, thousands of retail shops and factory outlets are around the city, many concentrated on **Bridge Road** near Punt Road and **Swan Street** near Church Street in Richmond. You'll find designer clothes, many just last season's fashions, at a fraction of the original price.

Collins Street features most international labels as well as shoe heaven **Miss Louise,** 123 Collins St. (✆ **03/9654 7730**). Nearby Flinders Lane has earned style status with the likes of **Alice Euphemia,** 241 Flinders Lane (✆ **03/9650 4300**), which stocks upcoming Australian and New Zealand designers. Stop at **Aesop,** 238 Flinders Lane (✆ **03/9654 1331**), for its aromatherapy creams and lotions; down the road is **Christine,** 181 Flinders Lane (✆ **03/9654 2011**), where women have been known to faint over the accessories. **Little Collins Street** is another fashion-rat run. At 150 Little Collins St., look for local labels **Bettina Liano** (✆ **03/9654 1912**), **Scanlan & Theodore** (✆ **03/9650 6195**), and **Verve** (✆ **03/9639 5886**).

**Country Road** Country Road is one of Australia's best-known names for men's and women's fashion. The cool, classic looks don't come cheap, but the quality is worth it. Country Road also sells designer cooking equipment and housewares. 252 Toorak Rd. and other locations, including Chapel St., South Yarra. ✆ **1800/801 911** in Australia, or 03/9824 0133.

**R.M. Williams** Head here for genuine Australian gear: boots, Driza-Bone coats, and Akubra hats. In the Melbourne Central complex, between Latrobe and Lonsdale sts. ✆ **03/9663 7126.**

**Saba** Australian designer Joseph Saba has several in-vogue, very expensive boutiques for men and women in Melbourne, including one for each sex on Chapel Street (nos. 538 and 548) in South Yarra. This store caters to both men and women. 264 Collins St. ✆ **03/9654 3524.**

**Sam Bear** Sam Bear is a good bet for Outback-style fashions: Driza-Bone coats, Akubra bush hats, R.M. Williams boots and clothing, and my favorite, Blundstone boots. It also sells a solid range of camping equipment. 225 Russell St. ✆ **03/9663 2191.**

**Surf, Dive 'N Ski Australia** In addition to surfboards, boogie boards, and sunglasses, this store stocks a wide range of hip and happening beachwear at reasonable prices. All the big names in Australian surf wear are here, including Ripcurl, Quicksilver, and Billabong. The Jam Factory, Chapel St., South Yarra. ✆ **03/9826 4071.**

**Vegan Wares** Instead of leather, Vegan Wares uses microfiber to create tough, stylish shoes, bags, and belts. It's not just for vegetarians; carnivores enjoy it, too! 78 Smith St., Collingwood. ✆ **03/9417 0230.**

### FOODSTUFFS

**Haigh's Chocolates** Indulge in some 50 types of Australia's best chocolate, from milk to dark to fruit flavored. I recommend the Sparkling Shiraz truffle if you need a serious treat. 26 Collins St. ✆ **03/9650 2114;** and Shop 27, Block Arcade, 282 Collins St. ✆ **03/9654 7673.**

**Melbourne Candy Kitchen** If you have a sweet tooth, you're likely to spend a fortune at this traditional little candy shop that makes its goodies before your eyes. Rock candy is a specialty, and you can get your name (or the name of someone back home) spelled out in its center. Shop 20, Royal Arcade. ✆ **03/9663 5654.**

*Fun Fact* **Death by Chocolate!**

If you love chocolate, sign up for a chocolate walk (✆ **03/9815 1228** or 04/1215 8017; www.chocoholictours.com.au). The **Chocolate Indulgence Walk** takes you on a tasting tour of Cadbury's, Myer, New Zealand Natural Ice Creamery, Chocolate Box, and Darrell Lea, and finishes with chocolate cake at a cafe. The 2-hour tour leaves Saturday at 12:30pm. The **Chocolates & Other Desserts Walk** includes tasting plenty of ice creams and chocolates as you tour kitchens and talk to chefs. The tour finishes with afternoon tea at the Grand Hyatt. This tour leaves Saturday at 2:30pm. During the **Chocolate Brunch Walk,** you try coffee and pastries at some of Melbourne's grooviest cafes. Each tour costs A$28 (US$22) per person, free for children under 6. Reservations are essential.

### JEWELRY

**Altman & Cherny** Even if you're not in the market to buy, it's worth coming here to check out "Olympic Australia," the largest gem opal in the world. It was found in Coober Pedy in South Australia in 1956 and is valued at A$2.5 million (US$2 million). The store offers tax-free shopping for tourists with a passport and an international airline ticket. 128 Exhibition St., near Little Collins St. ✆ **03/9650 9685.**

**Dinosaur Designs** Dinosaur Designs is taking the jewelry design world by storm with its range of artistic pieces made out of resin. The shop has modern housewares as well. None of it's cheap, but the odd item won't break the bank. 562 Chapel St., South Yarra. ✆ **03/9827 2600.**

**e.g.etal** Shop here for fresh, innovative jewelry by 50 or so of Australia's leading and emerging designers. 185 Little Collins St. ✆ **03/9663 4334.**

## 8 Melbourne After Dark

Melbourne can be an exciting place once the sun has set. The pubs and bars are far better than those in Sydney. Friday and Saturday nights will see most pubs (of both the trendy and the down-to-earth variety) packed to the rafters, and at lunchtime those that serve food are popular, too. To find out what's happening, check the Friday entertainment guide in the *Age,* Melbourne's daily broadsheet.

### THE PERFORMING ARTS

Melbourne is the most dynamic performing arts city in Australia. Its theaters offer the whole gamut, from offbeat independent productions to large-scale Broadway-style musicals. The city is also the home of the most prestigious festivals, with the annual **Melbourne Fringe Festival** (the first 3 weeks in Oct) and the annual **Melbourne International Comedy Festival** (from the end of Mar to roughly the end of Apr) attracting the best of Australian and international talent.

Venues all over the city participate in the Melbourne International Comedy, and the Fringe Festival sees the streets, pubs, theaters, and restaurants playing host to everyone from jugglers and fire-eaters to musicians and independent productions covering all art forms. Try to get tickets if you're in town during either festival, but keep in mind that hotels fill up fast at these times. For more information, visit www.melbournefringe.com.au or www.comedyfestival.com.au.

Another good time to plan your visit is during the annual **Melbourne International Film Festival** (mid-July through the first week in Aug), when new releases, shorts, and avant-garde movies play at venues around the city. For details and schedules, check www.melbournefilmfestival.com.au.

The official government entertainment-information site, www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/events, shows what's playing in the theater world for up to 2 months in advance, as well as what's happening in dance, film, comedy, music, exhibitions, sports, and tours.

The best place to buy tickets for everything from theater to major sporting events, and to obtain details on schedules, is **Ticketmaster** (✆ **1800/062 849** or 13 28 849 in Australia, or 03/9299 9079; www.ticketmaster7.com).

### THE HEART OF MELBOURNE'S CULTURAL LIFE

**Victorian Arts Centre** ★★ The spire atop the Theatres Building of the Victorian Arts Center, on the banks of the Yarra River, crowns the city's leading performing arts

### *Value* Half-Price Tickets

Buy tickets for entertainment events, including opera, dance, and drama, on the day of the performance from the Half-Tix Desk in the Melbourne Town Hall on 90–120 Swanston St. (✆ **03/9650 9420**). The booth is open Monday and Saturday from 10am to 2pm, Tuesday through Thursday 11am to 6pm, Friday 11am to 6:30pm. Tickets must be purchased in cash. Available shows are displayed on the booth door. ***Note:*** You can't get show information over the phone.

complex. Beneath it, the State Theatre, the Playhouse, and the Fairfax present performances that are the focal point of culture in Melbourne.

The **State Theatre,** seating 2,079 on three levels, can accommodate elaborate stagings of opera, ballet, musicals, and more. The **Playhouse** is a smaller venue that often books the Melbourne Theatre Company. The **Fairfax** is more intimate still and is often used for experimental theater or cabaret.

Adjacent to the Theatres Building is the **Melbourne Concert Hall,** home of the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra and the State Orchestra of Victoria, and often host to visiting orchestras. Many international stars have graced this stage, which is known for its excellent acoustics. 100 St. Kilda Rd. ✆ **1300/136 166** for tickets, or 03/9281 8000. Fax 03/9281 8282. www.vicartscentre.com.au. Tickets A$20–A$140 (US$16–US$112).

## ADDITIONAL VENUES & THEATERS

Check the *Age* to see what productions are scheduled during your visit. Odds are that the leading shows will take place in one of the following venues:

**The Comedy Club** The Comedy Club is a Melbourne institution. Come here to see local and international comedy acts, musicals, and special shows. It offers dinner and a show Friday and Saturday for A$40 to A$45 (US$32–US$36), depending on the performer; and a show only Thursday through Saturday for approximately A$20 (US$16). Level 1, 380 Lygon St., Carlton. ✆ **03/9348 1622.**

**Comedy Theatre** The Comedy Theatre, with its ornate Spanish rococo interior, feels intimate even though it seats more than 1,000 people. Plays and musicals usually fill the bill, but dance companies and comedians also appear. 240 Exhibition St. ✆ **03/9299 9886** for theater, ✆ **13 28 49** in Australia for Ticketek.

**The Forum Theatre** The Forum books well-known bands and international comedians. Tables and chairs are in cabaret-style booths, from which you can order drinks and meals. 154 Flinders St. ✆ **03/9299 9886.**

**Her Majesty's Theatre** A fire destroyed the original theater here, but the current structure retains the original facade and the Art Deco interior added during a 1936 renovation. Musicals, such as the Australian premier of *Chicago,* frequent the boards. 219 Exhibition St. ✆ **03/9663 3211.**

**The Princess Theatre** This huge facility hosts extravaganza productions. The theater opened its doors in 1886, and it still has a dramatic marble staircase and ornate plaster ceilings. 163 Spring St. ✆ **03/9663 3300.**

**The Regent Theatre** Built in 1929, the Regent fell into disrepair, and its stage was dark for 25 years. Now, after an A$35-million (US$28-million) renovation, it's been restored to its former glory. Tickets are available in the U.S. through ATS Tours

(✆ **800/423-2880**). The theater offers a range of dining packages. 191 Collins St. ✆ **03/9299 9800.**

**Sidney Myer Music Bowl** This huge outdoor entertainment center, run under the auspices of the Victorian Arts Center Trust, schedules opera, jazz, and ballet in the warmer months (and ice skating in the winter). It underwent extensive renovations in 2000. King's Domain, Alexandra Ave. ✆ **03/9281 8360.**

## CINEMAS

Most of the city cinemas are within 2 blocks of the intersection of Bourke and Russell streets. Tickets cost A$9 to A$14 (US$7.20–US$11). Among the independent cinemas, the one that stands out is the **Astor,** 3 Chapel St. (at the corner of Chapel and Dandenong Rd.), East St. Kilda (✆ **03/9510 1414**). Housed in a superb Art Nouveau building, the Astor shows well-chosen classic movies.

## THE CLUB & MUSIC SCENE

Melbourne's nightclub scene used to center on King Street, and while that area is still popular with large disco-style venues, the city is now awash in unique, hidden bars and clubs. It's best just to follow the crowds—or in some cases that couple slipping down a side lane and disappearing into a dimly lit entrance. Otherwise, the following options are more enduring in their appeal.

**Bella Vista Social Club** BVSC is upstairs from the popular Becco restaurant. Ultramodern in a microsuede way, this place jumps with a late-night crowd of many splendid hues—arty young things mingling with the suits, all watching the goings-on in the lane below on a large-screen hookup. 11–25 Crossley St. ✆ **03/9663 3000.**

**Bennetts Lane Jazz Club** ★ Often exceptional and always varied, this venue is simply the best in Melbourne for jazz. The back-lane location may be a little hard to find, but inside it's everything you've always imagined a jazz club to be. The best international players seek it out. 25 Bennetts Lane. ✆ **03/9663 2856.** www.bennettslane.com. Cover A$10 (US$8).

**Cicciolina Back Bar** This softly lit, alluring hideaway offers plush leather booths and a fine range of cocktails. Add a particularly attentive staff, and you've got one of the best little bars in the greater St. Kilda region. 130 Acland St. (enter from arcade), St Kilda. ✆ **03/9525 3333.**

**Double Happiness** This tiny but hugely atmospheric bar is detail at its best. The retro-Asian theme would make Chairman Mao proud. Mix with the hip crowd from the CBD (Central Business District), and try the Gang of Four cocktail (mango, vodka, Cointreau, and lemon). 21 Liverpool St (off Bourke St). ✆ **03/9650 4488.** www.double-happiness.org.

**Hi-Fi Bar & Ballroom** Featuring lots of live music—mostly of the hard rock and contemporary persuasion—and patronized by the younger set, this cavernous underground venue features many visiting acts. 125 Swanson St. ✆ **03/9654 7617.** www.thehifi.com.au. Cover Sat A$20 (US$16).

**Honky Tonks** Head down a dark lane into a nondescript warehouse and up a flight of wooden stairs to discover this bar's happy revelers enjoying live laid-back jazz or a DJ weaving his magic on the turntables. The cocktail bar is buzzing and the view from the deep lounges across the Yarra River to the Botanic Gardens is surreal. Duckboard Place. ✆ **03/9662 4555.**

**KingPin** Why not combine your two favorite pastimes? Bowling and drinking! Experience the purple lounge, which really mixes it up, with cool DJs and great cocktails. Situated in the Crown Casino complex, this venue is open 24/7, so happy days really are here again. 8 Whiteman St., Southbank. ✆ **03/9292 7009.** Cover varies. Bowling around A$20 (US$16).

**Melbourne Supper Club** Upstairs from the ever-popular European cafe-restaurant, the Melbourne Supper Club is a perfect post-theater venue. Deep leather lounges and a giant circular window that looks directly onto the beautifully lit Parliament House buildings make this bar a place to idle, smoke a cigar, or dwell over a bottle of your favorite wine. 161 Spring St. ✆ **03/9654 6300.**

**Misty** Funk meets Barbarella in this ultra-hip and arty venue, one of the quintessential Melbourne bars. Here, down a cobbled lane, smooth cocktails mix with live combos or soulful DJs. 3–5 Hosier Lane. ✆ **03/9663 9202.**

**Revolver** This venue usually pumps with techno music, although bands play on weekends with dancing later. 229 Chapel St., Prahan. ✆ **03/9521 5985.** Cover weekends A$10 (US$8).

**Tony Starrs Kitten Club** Don't be put off by the name—this is one great place. A restaurant-bar on the lower level serves an array of excellent tapas and more exotic fare. But the action is at the upstairs Galaxy Lounge, where most nights you'll find entertainment—ranging from the peculiar to the animated to just plain bizarre. Don't forget to visit the Love Lounge, with its floor-to-ceiling red fabric, heart-shaped lounges, and secluded booths. The club is open for lunch and dinner until 1am. 267 Little Collins St. ✆ **03/9650 2448.** Cover Sat A$5 (US$4).

## WHERE TO SHARE A PINT

Pubs generally stay open from mid-morning until at least midnight most nights. Many remain open until 2 or 3am on Friday and Saturday night, and you can always find a few open 24 hours.

All the rage in Melbourne just now is a pack of 52 playing cards called **Bar Secrets Melbourne.** The cards have pictures of and information (including maps) on the hippest and most unusual pubs and cocktail bars in town. Locals pick out a few at random, and the night's planned. The cards cost A$9.95 (US$7.95) at bookshops and newsdealers in town. They are well worth seeking out. Last time I visited Melbourne I found myself weaving up dark alleyways, climbing into lofts and down into basements, and always ending up somewhere unique.

**Belgian Beer Café Bluestone** Belgian beer culture in all its forms. Pretend that you're in Brussels in this atmospheric cafe. Full-bodied Belgian brews dominate. While downing your pint, try the traditional streamed mussels. In warmer weather, sitting in the parklike garden is a delight. 557 St. Kilda Rd. ✆ **03/9529 2899.**

**Bridie O'Reillys** Bridie O'Reillys is one of Melbourne's best Irish pubs, complete with traditional dark-wood decor and good beer. The two-level pub has 19 different beers on tap (seven of them Irish). There is live Irish music every night starting around 9pm. The place gets quite crowded on weekends. 62 Little Collins St. (just off Exhibition St.). ✆ **03/9650 0840.**

**Chaise Lounge** Any semblance of barroom normality breaks down at this chic boudoir-style place featuring lipstick-colored walls, a bust of a Roman god, diamanté-strung curtains, sofas, and glitter balls. Basement, 105 Queen St. ✆ **03/9670 6120.**

**Cookie** The latest hot place to hang out is an unlikely combination of good-value Thai eatery, beer hall, and smart cocktail bar, complete with plastic doilies and murals. It's open daily from noon to 11pm. 252 Swanston St. ✆ **03/9663 7660.**

**The Cricketers Club Bar** Locals come to this popular English-style pub to lift a glass surrounded by the relics of Australia's summer passion. Glass cases are packed full of cricket bats, pads, and stumps, and the plush green carpets and solid mahogany woodwork give the place a touch of class. In the Windsor Hotel, 103 Spring St. ✆ **03/9653 0653.**

**The Croft Institute** This lane-side bar is a small, lurid, bottle-green establishment, which is notably famous for its powerful cocktails and the city's largest private collection of laboratory apparatus. For the young only. 21–25 Croft Alley. ✆ **03/9671 4399.**

**Jimmy Watson's Wine Bar** While probably not the best spot for a pint, Jimmy's is something of an institution. One of Melbourne's oldest wine bars, it's a cozy affair where all types of people chat while sampling a vast range of wines. In the attached dining area, excellent food is expertly teamed with the perfect wine. Come to talk or simply read the paper. 333 Lygon St., Carlton. ✆ **03/9347 3985.**

**The Prince St. Kilda** This pub is a legend among the locals. Though refurbished, it retains its original rough-at-the-edges appearance. Bands, some of them big names, play most nights. 2 Acland St., St Kilda. ✆ **03/9536 1100.**

**Windsor Castle** Up Chapel Street and through Prahan are Windsor and its best-kept secret, the Windsor Castle Hotel, home of the local stylemeisters. This is a perfect weekend meeting place for pub food, which you can enjoy in the sunny courtyard or in the plush interior. You'll find DJs and barbecue on weekends. Look for the giant pink elephants outside. At the corner of Albert and Upton sts., Windsor. ✆ **03/9525 0239.**

**The Young and Jacksons Hotel** After a major renovation, Melbourne's oldest (and arguably most famous) pub is a newfound pleasure, whether for a drink or a meal in the stylish upstairs restaurant or bistro areas. Head upstairs to see the naked *Chloe,* a famous painting brought to Melbourne for the Great Exhibition in 1880. The pub, which was built in 1853 and started selling beer in 1861, has a few years on *Chloe,* which was painted in Paris in 1875. The painting has a special place in the hearts of customers. At the corner of Flinders and Swanston sts. ✆ **03/9650 3884.**

### THE CASINO

**Crown Casino** Australia's largest casino is a plush affair that's open 24 hours. You'll find all the usual roulette and blackjack tables and so on, as well as an array of gaming machines. Believe me, you can lose big here. There are some 25 restaurants and 40 bars on the premises. A good choice for lunch is the **Red Emperor.** Its Cantonese *yum cha* is superb, as is the service. There's a great view of the Yarra River. It's open Monday through Saturday from noon to 3pm, Sunday 11am to 4pm. Casino: Clarendon St., Southbank. ✆ **03/9292 6868.** Red Emperor: 3 Southgate Ave., upper level Southgate. ✆ **03/9699 4170.** *Yum cha* items A$3.85–A$8.80 (US$3.10–US$7.05). AE, DC, MC. V.

## 9 Side Trips from Melbourne

### DANDENONG RANGES

40km (25 miles) E of Melbourne

Melbournians traditionally do a "day in the Dandenongs" from time to time, topping off their getaway with Devonshire tea, scones, and jam at one of the many cafes en

route. Up in the cool, high country you'll find native bush, famous gardens, the Dandenong Ranges National Park, historic attractions such as the Puffing Billy—a vintage steam train—and plenty of restaurants and cozy B&Bs. The Dandenong Ranges National Park is one of the state's oldest, set aside in 1882 to protect its mountain ash forests and lush tree-fern gullies.

**GETTING THERE** To get to the area, take the Burwood Highway from Melbourne, then the Mount Dandenong Tourist Road, which starts at Upper Ferntree Gully and winds through the villages of Sassafras, Olinda, Mount Dandenong, and Kalorama to Montrose. If you take a turnoff to Sherbrook or extend your journey into a loop taking in Seville, Woori Yallock, Emerald, and Belgrave, you'll see a fair slice of the local scenery. A really good tour operator is **A Tour With A Difference** (✆ **03/9754 1699;** www.atwad.com.au). The tour starts at your Melbourne hotel, where a 10-person bus will pick you up, and includes lots of great things to do and see in the Dandenongs, including a ride on the Puffing Billy. The cost is A$125 (US$100) per person and includes morning tea and lunch.

**VISITOR INFORMATION** The **Dandenong Ranges and Knox Visitor Information Centre,** 1211 Burwood Hwy., Upper Ferntree Gully, VIC 3156 (✆ **1800/645 505** in Australia, or 03/9758 7522; fax 03/9758 7533), is open daily from 9am to 5pm.

## WHERE TO DINE

**Churinga Café** CAFE This is a nice place for a quick lunch or morning or afternoon tea. It has pleasant gardens and is just across from the William Ricketts Sanctuary (see below). You can get everything from curries to traditional British fare. Devonshire tea costs A$6 (US$4.80).

1381 Mt. Dandenong Tourist Rd., Mt. Dandenong. ✆ **03/9751 1242.** Main courses A$13–A$14 (US$10–US$11). AE, DC, MC, V. Sat–Wed 10:30am–4:30pm.

**Wild Oak Café** MODERN AUSTRALIAN For good home cooking, you can't beat this cozy cafe. The food includes the likes of chargrilled steak, smoked Atlantic salmon risotto, linguini with prawns, and Cajun chicken. The restaurant has a few vegetarian selections, and a roaring log fire in winter.

232 Ridge Rd., Mt. Dandenong. ✆ **03/9751 2033.** Main courses A$16–A$19 (US$13–US$15). DC, MC, V. Daily 10am–10pm.

## NATURE WALKS

Most people come here to get out of the city for a pleasant bushwalk, and in that way it's the equivalent of Sydney's Blue Mountains. Some of the better walks include the easy 2.5km (1.5-mile) stroll from the **Sherbrook Picnic Ground** through the forest, and the **Thousand Steps** and **Kokoda Track Memorial Walk,** a challenging rainforest track from the Fern Tree Gully Picnic Ground up to One Tree Hill. Along the way are plaques commemorating Australian troops who fought and died in Papua New Guinea in World War II.

## FOR GARDENING BUFFS

**Bonsai Farm** If you don't like to crane your neck when it comes to looking at trees, then visit this large display of petite bonsai. Some of them are many decades old and cost a pretty penny.

Mt. Dandenong Tourist Rd., Mt. Dandenong. ✆ **03/9751 1150.** Free admission. Wed–Sun 11am–5pm. Train to Croydon, then bus no. 688.

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Bacchus Marsh
Melton
Werribee
Geelong
Bellarine Hwy.
BELLARINE PENINSULA
Port Phillip Bay
Queenscliff
Portsea
Sorrento
Rosebud
Rye
Dromana
Balnarring
MORNINGTON PENINSULA
Great Ocean Rd.
Princes Hwy.
Melbourne
Nepean Hwy.
DANDENONG
Maroondah Hwy.
Yarra Glen
Healesville
YARRA VALLEY
Lilydale
Mt. Dandenong
Olinda
Belgrave
Upper Ferntree Gully
Emerald
DANDENONG RANGES NAT'L PARK
RANGES
Warburton
Princes Hwy.
South Gippsland Hwy.
Kooweerup
Drouin
Warragul
Korumburra
Stony Pt.
Cowes
Newhaven
Penguin Parade
Phillip Island
FRENCH ISLAND
Bass Strait
Ferry
Information
Wineries
31
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**National Rhododendron Gardens** From September through November, thousands of rhododendrons and azaleas burst into bloom in these magnificent gardens. There are 42 hectares (104 acres) in all, with a 3km (1.75-mile) path leading past flowering exotics and native trees as well as vistas over the Yarra Valley. A tearoom is open every day in the spring and on weekends at other times. Visitors flock here in summer for the glorious walks and again in autumn when the leaves are turning.

The Georgian Rd., Olinda. ✆ **03/9751 1980.** Admission Sept–Nov A$6.70 (US$5.35) adults, A$2.20 (US$1.75) children 10–16, A$14 (US$11) families; Dec–Aug A$5.60 (US$4.50) adults, A$2.20 (US$1.75) children, A$14 (US$11) families. Daily 10am–4:30pm. Closed Dec 25. Train to Croydon, then bus no. 688, or train to Belgrave and bus no. 694.

**William Ricketts Sanctuary** This wonderful garden, in a forest of mountain ash, features clay figures representing the Aboriginal Dreamtime. The sculptures were created over the lifetime of sculptor William Ricketts, who died in 1993 at the age of 94. The garden encompasses fern gullies and waterfalls spread out over 13 hectares (32 acres), with the sculptures occupying .8 hectares (2 acres).

Mt. Dandenong Tourist Rd., Mt. Dandenong. ✆ **03/9751 1300.** www.parkweb.vic.gov.au. Admission A$5.20 (US$4.15) adults, A$4.20 (US$3.35) students, A$2 (US$1.60) children 10–16, A$13 (US$10) families. Daily 10am–4:30pm. Closed Dec 25 and days of total fire ban. Train to Croydon, then bus no. 688.

### FOR TRAIN BUFFS

**Puffing Billy Railway** *Kids* For almost a century, the Puffing Billy steam railway has chugged over a 13km (8-mile) track from Belgrave to Emerald Lake. Passengers ride on open carriages and enjoy lovely views as the train passes through forests and fern gullies and over a National Trust–classified wooden trestle bridge. Trips take around an hour each way. A further stretch of track to Gembrook opened in 1998. Daily trips to Gembrook take an extra 45 minutes and cost A$26 (US$21) for adults, A$13 (US$10) for children 4 to 16. Night trains also run on occasional Saturdays.

Belgrave Station, Belgrave. ✆ **03/9754 6800** (recorded information). www.puffingbilly.com.au. Admission A$18 (US$14) adults, A$10 (US$8) children 4–16, A$51 (US$41) families. Mon–Fri 10:30, 11:15am, noon, and 2:30pm; Sat–Sun 10:30, 11:45am, 1:30, and 3:15pm. Closed Dec 25. Train from Flinders St. Station in Melbourne to Belgrave; Puffing Billy station is a short walk away.

## YARRA VALLEY ★

61km (40 miles) E of Melbourne

The Yarra Valley is a wine-growing region east of Melbourne. It's dotted with villages, historic houses, gardens, crafts shops, antiques centers, and restaurants, as well as dozens of wineries. There are some good bushwalks around here, and the Healesville Sanctuary is one of the best places in Australia to see native animals.

### ESSENTIALS

**GETTING THERE** **McKenzie's Bus Lines** (✆ **03/9853 6264**) operates service from Lilydale Railway Station to Healesville. (Catch a train from Melbourne's Spencer Street Station to Lilydale; the trip takes about an hour.) Buses connect with trains roughly 12 times a day; call for exact connection times.

If you're driving, pick up a map of the area from the Royal Automotive Club of Victoria (✆ **03/9790 3333**) in Melbourne. Maps are free if you're a member of an auto club in your home country, but remember to bring your membership card. Alternatively, you can pick up a map at the tourist office. Take the Maroondah Highway from Melbourne to Lilydale and on to Healesville. The trip takes around 1 hour 15 minutes.

**VISITOR INFORMATION** Pick up details on attractions and lodging at the **Yarra Valley Visitor Information Centre,** Old Court House, Harker Street, Healesville (✆ **03/5962 2600;** fax 03/5962 2040). It's open daily from 9am to 5pm.

## WHERE TO STAY & DINE

**Melba Lodge** ★ These stylish, modern accommodations opened in Yarra Glen, in the heart of the Yarra Valley wine region, in early 1999. Of the luxurious guest rooms, four have queen-size beds and two have king-size beds and a Jacuzzi; all have private bathrooms. There's a comfortable lounge with an open fire and a billiard room. The lodge is only a few minutes' walk from historic Yarra Glen, which has antiques shops and a crafts market. There are plenty of restaurants and wineries around, too. It's a short drive to the Healesville Sanctuary.

939 Melba Hwy., Yarra Glen, VIC 3775. ✆ **03/9730 1511.** Fax 03/9730 1566. www.melbalodge.com.au. 8 units. A$130 (US$104) queen room; A$190 (US$152) king room. Rates include cooked breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Bar; Jacuzzi; business center; massage; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV.

**Sanctuary House Motel Healesville** This place is very handy for visiting the sanctuary and even better if you want to relax and sample some good Yarra Valley wine. Just 400m (1,312 ft.) from the Healesville Sanctuary, Sanctuary House sits in some 4 hectares (10 acres) of beautiful bushland. The rooms are typical motel-style. Also available are two units with kitchens and amenities to assist travelers with disabilities. These go for A$140 (US$112) on weekends, A$130 (US$104) weekdays. A five-bedroom farmhouse nearby sits on 8 hectares (20 acres) featuring a pool and log fireplace; to rent it, go through the motel.

Badger Creek Rd. (P.O. Box 162), Healesville, VIC 3777. ✆ **03/5962 5148.** Fax 03/5962 5392. www.sanctuaryhouse.com.au. 12 units (all with shower). A$80–A$90 (US$64–US$72) double. MC, V. Train from Flinders St. Station to Lilydale, then bus no. 685. **Amenities:** Restaurant; small outdoor heated pool; Jacuzzi; sauna; children's play area; game room; massage; babysitting; laundry service; nonsmoking rooms; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* A/C, TV, kitchen (in some), fridge, hair dryer, iron.

## EXPLORING THE VALLEY

There are three principal roads in the valley: Melba Highway, Maroondah Highway, and Myers Creek Road, which form a triangle. Within the triangle are three smaller roads, Healesville–Yarra Glen Road, Old Healesville Road, and Chum Creek Road, which all lead to wineries. Most people start their tour of the Yarra Valley from Lilydale and take in several cellar-door tastings at vineyards along the route.

**Balloon Aloft** (✆ **1800/028 568** in Australia) offers dawn balloon rides over the wineries for A$255 (US$204) for adults and A$170 (US$136) for children over 8. The flight includes a champagne breakfast.

**Healesville Sanctuary** ★ *Finds* Forget about seeing animals in cages—this preserve is a great place to spot native animals in almost-natural surroundings. You can see wedge-tailed eagles, dingoes, koalas, wombats, reptiles, and more, all while strolling through the peppermint-scented gum forest, which rings with the chiming of bellbirds. Sir Colin McKenzie started the sanctuary in 1921 as a center to preserve endangered species and educate the public. There's a gift shop, a cafe serving light meals, and picnic grounds.

Badger Creek Rd., Healesville. ✆ **03/5957 2800.** Fax 03/5957 2870. www.zoo.org.au. Admission A$19 (US$15) adults, A$9.50 (US$7.60) children 4 to 15, A$48 (US$38) families. Daily 9am–5pm. Train from Flinders Street Station to Lilydale, then bus no. 685.

## PHILLIP ISLAND: PENGUINS ON PARADE

139km (86 miles) S of Melbourne

Phillip Island's **penguin parade,** which happens every evening at dusk, is one of Australia's most popular animal attractions. There are other, less crowded places in Australia where watching homecoming penguins feels less staged (Kangaroo Island in South Australia for one), but guides and boardwalks protect the little ones and their nesting holes from the throngs. Nevertheless, the commercialism of the Penguin Parade puts a lot of people off—busloads of tourists squashed into a sort of amphitheater hardly feels like being one with nature. Phillip Island also offers nice beaches, good bushwalking, fishing, and Seal Rocks, home to a colony of up to 16,000 fur seals. If you have the time, you could spend at least 2 days here.

### ESSENTIALS

**GETTING THERE** Most visitors come to Phillip Island on a day trip from Melbourne and arrive in time for the Penguin Parade and dinner. Several tour companies run day trips. Among them are **Gray Line** (✆ **1300/858 687** in Australia, or 03/9663 4455), which operates penguin trips daily departing Melbourne at 1:30pm and returning at around 11:30pm. Tours cost A$80 (US$64) for adults and A$40 (US$32) for children. Gray Line also offers full-day trips including the Dandenong Ranges and a ride on the Puffing Billy steam train.

An excellent budget option is a half-day trip with **Melbourne Sightseeing** (✆ **03/9663 3388**). Tours depart Melbourne daily at 1:30pm and include visits to a cattle farm where you can hand-feed kangaroos, the Koala Conservation Centre, and a seal colony, as well as the Penguin Parade. The coach returns to Melbourne at 10:30pm. The trip costs A$75 (US$60) for adults (A$49/US$39 with a YHA card) and A$38 (US$30) for children. For the same price, an express bus leaves Melbourne at 5:30pm (returning at 11pm) and travels directly to the Penguin Parade.

If you're driving on your own, Phillip Island is an easy 2-hour trip from Melbourne along the South Gippsland Highway and then the Bass Highway. A bridge connects the highway to the mainland.

**V/Line trains** (✆ **13 22 32** in Australia, or 03/9619 5000; www.vlinepassenger.com.au) run in summer from Flinders Street Station to Phillip Island via Dandenong. The trip takes 2¼ hours and costs A$13 (US$10) one-way.

**VISITOR INFORMATION** The **Phillip Island Information Centre,** Phillip Island Tourist Road, Newhaven (✆ **1300/366 422** in Australia, or 03/5956 7447; www.phillipisland.net.au), is an attraction in itself, with interactive computer displays, relevant information, dioramas giving visitors a glimpse into the penguins' world, and a small theater. It's open daily from 9am to 5pm (to 6pm in summer).

### WHERE TO STAY

**Penguin Hill Country House B&B** This private home with views over sheep paddocks to Bass Strait is within walking distance of the Penguin Parade. Each room has good views and is stocked with antiques (as is much of the house) and queen-size beds. Two have an attached bathroom with shower, and the third has a private bathroom across the hall. There's a TV and a phone in the cozy lounge. The hosts can pick you up from Cowes.

Backbeach and Ventnor roads. (RMB 1093), Cowes, Phillip Island, VIC 3922. ✆/fax **03/5956 8777.** 3 units. A$130 (US$104) double. Rates include cooked breakfast. AE, MC, V. Children not accepted. **Amenities:** Tour desk; business center; limited room service; coin-op laundry; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* TV, fax, hair dryer, iron.

**Rothsaye on Lovers Walk** ★★ The penguins are just down the road and the beach is right on the doorstep—who could ask for anything more? The suites here are adjacent to the owner's home, and the one-bedroom cottage is set slightly apart. All rooms come with antiques and king-size beds. You also get a fruit basket, free fishing gear, beach chairs and umbrellas, magazines, and fresh flowers. Lovers Walk, a romantic floodlit path, leads from the doorstep to the center of Cowes. The owners also have a new beachside property nearby called Abaleigh on Lovers Walk. The two gorgeous suites there come with kitchens, barbecues, and good water views. They cost A$215 (US$172) a night.

2 Roy Ct., Cowes, Phillip Island, VIC 3922. ✆/fax **03/5952 2691.** www.rothsaye.com.au. 4 suites, 1 cottage. A$140–A$190 (US$112–US$152) suite or cottage. Rates include breakfast. MC, V. Children not accepted. **Amenities:** Golf course nearby; tour desk; laundry; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV/VCR, kitchen, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

## EXPLORING THE AREA

Visitors approach the island from the east, passing through the town of **Newhaven.** Just a little past Newhaven is the Phillip Island Information Centre (✆ **1300/366 422** in Australia, or 03/5956 7447).

The main town on the island, **Cowes** (pop. 2,400), is on the north coast. A stroll along its Esplanade is worthwhile. The Penguin Parade is on the far southwest coast.

The trip to the west coast of Phillip Island's Summerland Peninsula ends in an interesting rock formation called **The Nobbies.** This strange-looking outcropping can be reached at low tide by a basalt causeway. You'll get some spectacular views of the coastline and two offshore islands from here. On the farthest of these islands is a population of up to **12,000 Australian fur seals,** the largest colony in Australia. (Bring your binoculars.) This area is also home to thousands of nesting silver gulls.

On the north coast of the island, you can explore **Rhyll Inlet,** an intertidal mangrove wetland, where you can see wading birds such as spoonbills, oystercatchers, herons, egrets, cormorants, and the rare bar-tailed godwit and whimbrel.

Birders will also love **Swan Lake,** another breeding habitat for wetland birds.

Elsewhere, walking trails lead through heath and pink granite to **Cape Woolamai,** the island's highest point, where there are fabulous coastal views. From September through April, the cape is home to thousands of short-tailed shearwaters (also known as mutton birds).

If you really want to see a bit of the island (instead of just seeing the parade and dashing off), consider taking one of the 15 different tours offered by Mike Cleeland's **Island Nature Tours,** RMB 6080, Cowes, Phillip Island, VIC 3922 (✆ **03/5956 7883**).

**Koala Conservation Centre** Koalas were introduced to Phillip Island in the 1880s, and at first they thrived in the predator-free environment. However, overpopulation, the introduction of foxes and dogs, and the clearing of land for farmland and roads have all taken their toll. Though today you can still see a few koalas in the wild, the best place to find them is at this sanctuary, set up for research and breeding purposes. Visitors can get quite close to them, especially on the elevated boardwalk, which lets you peek into their treetop homes. For the best viewing, come around 4pm, when the ordinarily sleepy koalas are on the move.

Fiveways, Phillip Island Tourist Rd., Cowes. ✆ **03/5952 1307.** A$5.60 (US$4.50) adults, A$2.60 (US$2.10) children under 16, A$14 (US$11) families. Daily 10am–5pm.

**Phillip Island Penguin Reserve** The Penguin Parade takes place every night of the year at dusk, when hundreds of little penguins appear at the water's edge, gather in the shallows, and waddle up the beach toward their burrows in the dunes. They're the smallest of the world's 17 species of penguins, standing just 33 centimeters (13 in.) high, and they're the only penguins that breed on the Australian mainland. Fences and viewing stands were erected in the 1960s to protect the nesting areas. Flash photography is banned because it scares the little guys. Wear a sweater or jacket because it gets chilly after the sun goes down. A kiosk selling food opens an hour before the penguins turn up. Reservations for the Penguin Parade are essential on weekends and public holidays and in summer.

If you get to Phillip Island on your own and don't have a car, the **Penguin Parade Bus** (✆ **03/5952 1042** or 04/1736 0370) will pick you up from your hotel. The round-trip price is A$19 (US$15) for adults and A$11 (US$8.80) for children, and includes a ticket for the Penguin Parade.

Summerland Beach, Phillip Island Tourist Rd., Cowes. ✆ **1300/366 422** in Australia, or 03/5951 2800. www.penguins.org.au. Admission A$14 (US$11) adults, A$7 (US$5.60) children 4–13, A$35 (US$28) families. Visitor center daily 9am–6pm (5pm in winter); penguins arrive at sunset.

## AROUND PORT PHILLIP BAY

West of Melbourne, the Princes Highway (or Hwy. 1) heads toward Geelong via Werribee. South of Melbourne, the Nepean Highway travels along the coast to the Mornington Peninsula as far as Portsea. If you have time to stay the night, you can combine the two options, heading first down to the Mornington Peninsula (see below) and then taking the car and passenger ferry from Sorrento to Queenscliff (see below).

### WERRIBEE

This small country town is 32km (20 miles) southwest of Melbourne, a 30-minute drive along the Princes Highway. Trains run from Melbourne to Werribee station; a taxi from the station to the zoo costs around A$6 (US$4.80).

**The Mansion at Werribee Park** ★ Known as "the palace in the paddock," this 60-room Italianate mansion was built in 1877. It was quite the extravagant project in its day. In addition to touring the house, which has wonderful antique furniture, you may stroll around the grounds—132 hectares (326 acres) of formal gardens and bushland fronting the Werribee River—and have a picnic. You can also make advance arrangements to take one of the popular carriage rides that make their way through the property. Allow 1 to 2 hours. The Mansion offers a great afternoon tea.

K Rd., Werribee. ✆ **13 19 63** in Australia, or 03/9741 2444. www.visitvictoria.com/mansions. Free admission to park and picnic grounds; admission to mansion A$12 (US$9.60) adults, A$6 (US$4.80) children 5–15, A$29 (US$23) families. Nov–Mar daily 10am–5pm; Apr–Oct daily 10am–4pm. Closed Dec 25.

**Victoria's Open Range Zoo at Werribee** From inside your zebra-striped safari bus, you can almost touch the mainly African animals that wander almost freely over the plains—no depressing cages here. This high-caliber open-air zoo is closely associated with the Melbourne Zoo. There is also a walk-through section featuring African cats, including cheetahs, and monkeys. The safari-bus tour takes 50 minutes.

K Rd., Werribee. ✆ **03/9731 9600.** www.zoo.org.au. Admission A$19 (US$15) adults, A$9.50 (US$7.60) children 4–15, A$48 (US$38) families. Daily 9am–5pm (entrance gate closes at 3:30pm). Safari tours hourly 10am–3pm.

## THE MORNINGTON PENINSULA

The Mornington Peninsula, a scenic 40km (25 miles) stretch of windswept coastline and hinterland 80km (50 miles) south of Melbourne, is one of Melbourne's favorite day-trip and weekend-getaway destinations. The coast is lined with good beaches and thick bush consisting almost entirely of tea trees. (Early colonists used the tree's leaves as a tea substitute.) The **Mornington Peninsula National Park** stretches along the peninsula's Bass Strait foreshore from Portsea to Cape Shanck. It's home to gray kangaroos, southern brown bandicoots, echidnas, native rats, mice, reptiles, bats, and many forest and ocean birds. The park has numerous interconnecting walking tracks providing access to some remote beaches.

The Mornington Peninsula has become a popular wine-producing region. The peninsula's fertile soil, temperate climate, and rolling hills produce excellent wine, particularly pinot noir, shiraz, and chardonnay. Many wineries offer cellar-door tastings, others have excellent restaurants.

Along the route to the south you could stop at the **Morning Peninsula Regional Gallery,** 4 Vancouver St., Mornington (✆ **03/5975 4395**), to check out the work of famous Australian artists (open Tues–Sun 10am–5pm), or visit Arthurs Seat State Park to take a short hike or ride a chairlift to a 300m (984-ft.) summit offering glorious views over the surrounding bush. At Sorrento, take time out to spot pelicans on the jetty or visit the town's many galleries.

Also on the Mornington Peninsula is Australia's oldest and most famous maze, **Ashcombe Maze & Water Gardens,** Red Hill Road, Shoreham (✆ **03/5989 8387**), which also has extensive water and woodland gardens. There is even a rose maze made out of 1,300 rose bushes, which is spectacular when in full bloom over the spring and summer months. There's also a pleasant cafe with indoor and outdoor dining. The park is open daily from 10am to 5pm; admission is A$7 (US$5.60) for adults and A$4 (US$3.20) for children.

**GETTING THERE** From Melbourne, take the Mornington Peninsula Freeway to Rosebud, and then the Point Nepean Road. If you want to cross Port Phillip Bay from Sorrento to Queenscliff, take the **Queenscliff Sea Road Ferry** (✆ **03/5258 3255;** fax 03/5258 1877), which operates daily every hour on the hour between 8am and 6pm (there's an 8pm ferry Fri–Sat from mid-Sept to mid-Dec and daily from mid-Dec until Easter Thursday). Ferries from Queenscliff operate from 7am to 5pm (plus a 7pm ferry on days listed above). The fare is around A$48 (U$38) for cars but changes slightly depending on season. Foot-passenger fares are A$9 (US$7.20) for adults, A$7 (US$5.60) for children 5 to 15, and A$1 (US80¢) for children under 5. The crossing takes 35 to 40 minutes.

**VISITOR INFORMATION** The **Peninsula Visitor Information Centre,** Point Nepean Road, Dromana (✆ **1800/804 009** in Australia, or 03/5987 3078), has plenty of maps and information on the area and can also help book accommodations. It's open daily from 9am to 5pm. You can get more information on Mornington Peninsula National Park and all the other Victorian parks by calling ✆ **13 19 63** in Australia, or 03/5155 9264, or visiting www.parkweb.vic.gov.au.

### Where to Stay & Dine

**The Portsea Hotel** The rooms in this typical Australian motel on the seafront are done up with country-style furnishings. The standard twin rooms are basic; all share

bathrooms. Doubles have double beds and attached bathrooms with showers. Units with bathrooms also have TVs and refrigerators. The outdoor beer garden is pleasant on a sunny day.

3746 Point Nepean Rd., Portsea, VIC 3944. ✆ **03/5984 2213.** Fax 03/5984 4066. www.portseahotel.com.au. 25 units, 6 with bathroom. A$110–A$130 (US$88–US$104) double without bathroom; A$130–A$160 (US$104–US$128) double with bathroom; A$170–A$195 (US$136–US$156) bay-view suite. More expensive prices are for weekends. Winter discounts (around 20%) available. AE, DC, MC. V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; 3 bars; golf course nearby; tour desk; laundry service. *In room:* A/C, TV (in doubles), fridge (in doubles), coffeemaker.

13

# Victoria

*by Marc Llewellyn*

Australia's southernmost mainland state is astoundingly diverse. Within its boundaries are 35 national parks, encompassing every possible terrain, from rainforest and mountain ranges to sun-baked Outback desert and a coast where waves crash dramatically onto rugged sandstone outcroppings.

Melbourne (see chapter 12) may be this rugged state's heart, but the mighty Murray River, which separates Victoria from New South Wales, is its lifeblood, providing irrigation for vast tracks of semidesert land.

Most visitors to Victoria start out exploring Melbourne's cosmopolitan streets and then visit a few local wineries before heading for the gold fields around the historic city of Ballarat. Lots of them only experience a fraction of Victoria, but this wonderful and not overly touristed region is worth a closer look.

Visitors with more time might head inland to the mountains (perhaps for skiing or bushwalking at Mt. Hotham or Falls Creek), or seek out the wilderness of Snowy River National Park. Others head to the outback, to the Grampians National Park, and to Mildura through open deserts and past pink lakes and red sand dunes.

Lots of options await, and because many of them are rural, you'll find prices for accommodations very affordable. Whatever itinerary you choose, you're sure to find adventure and dramatic scenery.

See "Side Trips from Melbourne," in chapter 12, for information on the Dandenong Ranges, Yarra Valley, Phillip Island, and the Mornington Peninsula.

## EXPLORING THE STATE

**VISITOR INFORMATION** Pick up brochures and maps at the Victoria Visitor Information Centre, Corner Flinders Street and St Kilda Road, Melbourne, VIC 3000 (✆ **03/9658 9658**) or call the Victoria Tourism **Information Service** (✆ **13 28 42**) from anywhere in Australia to talk to a consultant about your plans. The service, open daily from 8am to 6pm, will also send you brochures. If you need information along the way, look for blue road signs with a rectangular white or yellow information symbol.

**GETTING THERE** **V/Line** (✆ **13 61 96** in Victoria, 13 22 32 in New South Wales, or 03/9619 5000; www.vline.com.au) runs a limited network of trains to various places in Victoria and continuing trips to most major centers with connecting buses. Several bus companies connect Melbourne with regional areas of Victoria; the biggest is **Greyhound Australia** (✆ **13 14 99** in Australia, or 07/4690 9950; www.greyhound.com.au).

## 1 Ballarat: Gold-Rush City ★★

113km (70 miles) W of Melbourne

Ballarat, Victoria's largest inland city (pop. 90,000), is all about gold. In 1851, two prospectors found gold nuggets scattered on the ground at a place known as, ironically, Poverty Point. Within a year, 20,000 people had drifted into the area, and Australia's El Dorado gold rush had begun.

In 1858, the second-largest chunk of gold discovered in Australia (the Welcome Nugget) was found, but by the early 1860s, most of the easily obtainable yellow metal was gone. Larger operators continued digging until 1918, and by then Ballarat had developed enough industry to survive without mining. Today, you can still see the gold rush's effects in the impressive buildings, built from the miners' fortunes.

### ESSENTIALS

**GETTING THERE** From Melbourne, Ballarat is a 1½-hour drive on the Great Western Highway. **V/Line** (✆ **13 61 96** in Victoria, 13 22 32 in New South Wales, or 03/9619 5000; www.vline.com.au) runs trains between the cities every day; the trip takes less than 2 hours. Round-trip fare is approximately A$34 (US$27) for adults and A$12 (US$9.60) for children. Ask about family-saver fares. A public bus connects the Ballarat train station with the town center.

Several companies offer day trips from Melbourne. They include **AAT Kings** (✆ **1300/556 100** in Australia, or 02/9252 2788; www.aatkings.com.au). A full-day tour costs A$108 (US$86) for adults and A$54 (US$43) for children.

**VISITOR INFORMATION** The **Ballarat Visitor Information Centre,** 39 Sturt St. (at the corner of Albert St.), Ballarat, VIC 3350 (✆ **1800/648 450** in Australia, or 03/5320 5741; www.ballarat.com), is open daily from 9am to 5pm.

### ACCOMMODATIONS YOU CAN AFFORD

The cheapest place to stay in town is the pleasantly quaint Sovereign Hill Lodge YHA (✆ **03/5222 3409;** www.yha.com.au) part of the re-created gold-mining Township. Dorms cost A$19 (US$15), twins with shared bathroom cost A$48 (US$38), and twins with private bathrooms cost A$55 (US$44).

**The Ansonia** ★ This boutique hotel in a restored Victorian building sports a glass atrium that runs the length of the property and is filled with plants and wicker chairs. Studio rooms are simply but comfortably furnished and have nice polished floorboards. The executive doubles are larger and a little plusher, and apartments have a separate lounge room. The two family rooms can sleep four people in two bedrooms.

### *Value* Ballarat Combination Passes

The **Ballarat Eureka Pass** includes unlimited 3-day admission to the Eureka Stockade Centre, Sovereign Hill, The Gold Museum, and Ballarat Fine Art Gallery. It costs A$36 (US$29) for adults, A$17 (US$14) for children 5 to 15, and A$92 (US$74) for families. A **Gold Pass** includes admission to The Gold Museum and Sovereign Hill, as well as a mine tour. It costs A$30 (US$24) for adults, A$15 (US$12) for children, and A$78 (US$62) for families.

Broken Hill
Mildura
Sturt Hwy.
20
SOUTH AUSTRALIA
Murray Valley
Murray River
Swan Hill
Sturt Hwy.
NEW SOUTH WALES
Sydney
Goulburn
Yass
Wagga Wagga
See Chapter 14
Canberra
A.C.T.
Snowy Mountains Hwy.
Monaro Hwy.
Albury
Wodonga
Cooma
Mt. Kosciusko
Horsham
Calder Hwy.
Echuca
Wangaratta
Bendigo
Western Highway
Mt. Buffalo
ALPINE NATIONAL PARK
GRAMPIANS NATIONAL PARK
GREAT DIVIDING RANGE
MT. BUFFALO NATIONAL PARK
Mt. Hotham
Falls Creek
SNOWY RIVER NATIONAL PARK
Hume Hwy.
Ballarat
Mt. Gambier
Hamilton
Melbourne
See Chapter 12
Geelong
Port Phillip Bay
Bellarine Peninsula
Mornington Peninsula
Torquay
Portland
Warrnambool
Great Ocean Road
The Twelve Apostles
Anglesea
Lorne
Peterborough
Apollo Bay
PORT CAMPBELL NATIONAL PARK
Princes Hwy.
Gippsland Lakes
Bairnsdale
Orbost
Lakes Entrance
Cape Howe
CROAJINGOLONG NATIONAL PARK
Ninety Mile Beach
Phillip Island
Bass Strait
Ferry to Tasmania
WILSONS PROMONTORY NATIONAL PARK
SOUTHERN OCEAN
AUSTRALIA
Victoria
0 50 mi
0 50 km
Skiing
Ferry Route

There is a comfortable library and sitting room with an open fire and tea- and coffee-making facilities, and plenty of flowers and art everywhere. Smoking is not allowed.

32 Lydiard St. S., Ballarat, VIC 3350. ✆ **03/5332 4678.** Fax 03/5332 4698. www.ballarat.com/ansonia.htm. 20 units. A$142 (US$114) studio; A$158 (US$126) executive double; A$175 (US$140) suite; A$225 (US$180) apt or family room. Packages available. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; tour desk; babysitting; laundry service; same-day dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* TV, dataport, hair dryer, iron.

**Ballarat Goldfields Holiday Park** ★ This very nice tourist park is a good option if you're staying around here for a couple of days. There are plenty of campsites and places to park a caravan/motor home, lots of pleasant wooden cabins, green spaces, and shade. The pool's very nice, too. The park is a stroll to the main street and a short drive to the main attractions.

108 Clayton St., Ballarat, VIC 3350. ✆ **1800/632 237** in Australia, or 03/5332 7888. www.ballaratgoldfields.com.au. A$29–A$38 (US$23–US$30) campsite (motor home/caravan/tent); A$60–A$126 (US$48–US$101) 1-bedroom cottage with shared bathroom; A$110–A$170 (US$88–US$136) 2-bedroom cottage with shared bathroom; A$150–A$210 (US$120–US$168) 2-bed spa cottage. AE, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Outdoor heated pool; tennis court; Jacuzzi; children's playground; TV and game room; fax facilities; Internet kiosk. *In room:* A/C, TV, kitchenette.

**The Sovereign Hill Lodge** The colonial-style wooden buildings adjacent to Sovereign Hill were built to resemble an 1850s government camp that was used to control (and tax) the minefields. The residence building has rooms with queen-size beds and a set of single bunks, and the office building has heritage rooms with four-poster beds and Baltic pine furnishings, some with Jacuzzis. There are eight double rooms in the superintendent's house; the barracks house dorm rooms that sleep up to eight people (A$55/US$44 for two people; A$32/US$26 for a single). There's a bar, 24-hour reception, and a game room. Guests get a 10% discount off admission to Sovereign Hill.

Magpie St., Ballarat, VIC 3350. ✆ **03/5333 3409.** Fax 03/5333 5861. www.sovereignhill.com.au. 37 units. A$126 (US$101) double; A$138 (US$110) heritage room. Extra person A$14 (US$11). Ask about their many packages. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; game room; babysitting; laundry service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, iron.

## WHERE TO DINE

**Robin Hood Family Bistro** BISTRO The Robin Hood is in a big old pub—not exactly a place where you'd expect to find a bistro catering to healthy eating. The bistro, though, is a past winner of the Real Meal Award, handed out by the Australian Hoteliers Association to promote healthier pub food. Everything here is made with low-fat and low-cholesterol ingredients. On the menu you'll find steak-and-kidney pie, beef curry, and several types of steak. Not healthy so far, perhaps, but there's an extensive salad bar, and all main courses come with a healthy portion of vegetables.

33 Peel St. N. ✆ **03/5331 3348.** Reservations recommended Fri–Sat. Main courses A$8–A$20 (US$6.40–US$16). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11:30am–2pm and 5:30–8pm.

## SEEING THE SIGHTS

Ballarat contains many reminders of the gold-rush era, but it all really comes to life in the colonial-era re-creation on Sovereign Hill.

**Ballarat Fine Art Gallery** After you've learned the story of the Eureka Uprising (see Blood on the Southern Cross, below), you may find it moving to come here and see the original Eureka flag. This provincial gallery also houses a collection of Australian art, including works by Sydney Nolan, Fred Williams, and Russell Drysdale. Look out for Tom Roberts' *Charcoal Burners* and Phillip Fox's *Love Story.*

40 Lydiard St. N. ✆ **03/5320 5858.** Admission A$5 (US$4) adults, A$2.50 (US$2) students, free for children under 16. Daily 9am–5pm. Closed Good Friday and Dec 25.

**Blood on the Southern Cross** ★ This 80-minute early-evening presentation re-creates the Eureka Uprising, one of the most important events in Australia's history, in a breathtaking light-and-sound show that covers Sovereign Hill's 25 hectares (62 acres). Bring something warm to wear because it can get chilly at night.

After gold was discovered, the government devised a system of gold licenses, charging miners a monthly fee even if they came up empty-handed. The miners had to buy a license every month, and corrupt gold field police (many of whom were former convicts) instituted a vicious campaign to extract the money.

When license checks intensified in 1854, even though most of the surface gold was gone, resentment flared. Prospectors began demanding political reforms, such as the right to vote, parliamentary elections, and secret ballots.

The situation exploded when the Eureka Hotel's owner murdered a miner but was set free by the government. The hotel was burned down in revenge, and more than 20,000 prospectors joined together, burned their licenses in a huge bonfire, and built a stockade over which they raised a flag.

Troops arrived at the Eureka Stockade the following month, but by then only 150 miners remained behind its walls. The stockade was attacked at dawn, and in the 15-minute skirmish, 24 miners were killed and 30 wounded. The civil uprising forced the government to act: The licenses were replaced with "miners rights" and cheaper fees, and the vote was introduced to Victoria.

Sovereign Hill, Bradshaw St. ✆ **03/5333 5777.** www.sovereignhill.com.au. Admission A$37 (US$30) adults, A$20 (US$16) children 5–15, A$100 (US$80) families. Package with daytime admission to Sovereign Hill (see below) A$62 (US$50) adults, A$31 (US$25) children, A$162 (US$130) families. Package with buffet dinner and stay at Sovereign Hill Lodge (see above) A$152 (US$122) adults, A$65 (US$52) children, A$405 (US$324) families. Call ahead for information about other packages. 2 shows nightly Mon–Sat (times vary seasonally). Closed early Aug.

**Eureka Stockade Centre** You can't miss this building, with its huge sail, signifying the flag of the Southern Cross, above the original miners' stockade. Relive the action of the battle through multimedia displays. The Contemplation Room, where you are asked to think about Australian history while listening to a trickling water soundscape, is a bit too hokey for me.

Eureka St. ✆ **03/5333 1854.** www.eurekaballarat.com. Admission A$8 (US$6.40) adults, A$4 (US$3.20) children, A$22 (US$18) families. Tues–Sun and Mon holidays 9am–5pm. Closed Dec 25.

**The Gold Museum** This interesting museum houses a large collection of gold nuggets found at Ballarat, as well as alluvial deposits, gold ornaments, and coins. It also holds gallery displays relating to the history of gold mining in the area. One hour should be enough to take in the museum.

Bradshaw St. (opposite Sovereign Hill). ✆ **03/5337 1107.** Admission A$7.30 (US$5.85) adults, A$3.50 (US$2.80) children. See Gold Pass in "Ballarat Combination Passes" box, above. Daily 10am–5:30pm.

**Sovereign Hill** ★★ *Kids* Australia's best outdoor museum transports you back to the 1850s and the heady days of the gold rush. More than 40 stone-and-wood reproduction buildings, including shops and businesses on Main Street, sit on the 25-hectare (62-acre) former gold-mining site. There are also tent camps around the diggings on the lowest part of the site, which would have been the outskirts of town. There is a lot to see and do, so expect to spend at least 4 hours.

The township bustles with actors in period costumes going about their daily business. In addition to seeing how miners and their families lived, visitors can pan for real gold, watch lessons in Victorian classrooms, ride in horse-drawn carriages, and watch potters, blacksmiths, and tanners make their wares.

On top of Sovereign Hill are the mineshafts and pithead equipment. The fascinating tour of a typical underground gold mine takes around 45 minutes. The Voyage to Discovery museum has artifacts from the gold rush, dioramas of mining scenes, and interactive computer displays. A restaurant, several cafes, coffee shops, and souvenir stores are around the site.

Bradshaw St. ✆ **03/5331 1944.** www.sovereignhill.com.au. Admission (including mine tour and Voyage to Discovery Museum) A$30 (US$24) adults, A$15 (US$12) children 5–15, A$78 (US$62) families. Daily 10am–5pm. Closed Dec 25. Bus: 9 from Curtis St.

## 2 The Great Ocean Road: One of the World's Most Scenic Drives ★★

Geelong: 75km (47 miles) SW of Melbourne; Torquay: 94km (58 miles) SW of Melbourne; Port Campbell National Park: 285km (177 miles) SW of Melbourne; Peterborough: 200km (124 miles) SW of Melbourne; Warrnambool: 263km (163 miles) SW of Melbourne

The Great Ocean Road—which hugs the coast from Torquay through Anglesea, Lorne, Apollo Bay, Port Campbell, and Peterborough, until it ends at Warrnambool—is one of Australia's most spectacular drives. The scenery along the 106km (66-mile) route includes huge cliffs, ocean vistas, beaches, rainforests, and some incredible rock formations. The most spectacular section is the 27km (17-mile) stretch between Princeton (the start of Port Campbell National Park) and Peterborough. The settlements along the highway are small, but they offer a number of accommodations choices.

The best way to travel along the Great Ocean Road is to drive yourself at a leisurely pace, stopping wherever your fancy takes you. The main attractions are in the coastal Port Campbell National Park, so don't be surprised if you're not overly impressed until you get there. If you are traveling on to Adelaide, you could stop off for 1 night along the Great Ocean Road and spend another night in the Coorong in South Australia (see section 5, "The Coorong," in chapter 11).

### ESSENTIALS

**ORGANIZED TOURS** The large coach operator **AAT Kings** (✆ **1300/556 100** in Australia, or 03/9274 7422; www.aatkings.com.au) runs daily trips along the Great Ocean Road—a journey I wouldn't like to attempt in a day. Tours cost A$116 (US$93) for adults, and A$58 (US$46) for children. **Gray Line Sightseeing Tours** (✆ **1300/858 687** in Australia, or 03/9663 4455; www.grayline.com) also has daily trips for a similar price; you can pay online in U.S. dollars.

**Wild-Life Tours** (✆ **1300/650 288** in Australia, or 03/9747 1882; www.wildlifetours.com.au) offers several well-priced multiday backpacker-style tours that take in the Great Ocean Road tour from Melbourne. A 1-day tour costs A$65 (US$52). The company also offers trips from Melbourne to see the Penguins on Parade on Phillip Island, and also trips between Melbourne and Sydney, and Melbourne and Adelaide. Prices do not include accommodations or food. Inquire about discounts.

**Autopia Tours** (✆ **03/9419 8878;** www.autopiatours.com.au) offers a 1-day tour from Melbourne taking in all the sights and including a bushwalk in the fabulous Otway Rainforest. It costs A$75 (US$60) per person. The company also does a more

relaxed 3-day tour for A$165 (US$132) per person without accommodations, though it can arrange rooms for you in hostels or hotels.

**V/Line** (✆ **13 61 96** in Victoria, or 03/9619 5000; www.vline.com.au) runs combined train-coach Coast Link service to Warrnambool, via Geelong, Lorne, Apollo Bay, and Port Campbell. The train leaves Melbourne daily at 8:50am, 12:40, and 6:08pm—but check before turning up. You transfer to a bus at Geelong. The bus tours the Great Ocean Road, stopping at lookout points (and for lunch) and continues to Warrnambool. The round-trip cost is A$80 (US$64) for adults and A$39 (US$31) for children. Ask about family-saver fares.

**VISITOR INFORMATION** Most places along the route have their own information centers. If you're coming from Melbourne, stop at the **Geelong & Great Ocean Road Visitors Centre,** Stead Park, Princess Highway, Geelong (✆/fax **03/5275 5797;** www.greatoceanrd.org.au). You can book accommodations here, which you should do in advance, especially in summer. The website gives you plenty of tour options. There's also a visitor center at the **National Wool Museum,** 26 Moorabool St., Geelong (✆ **1800/620 888** in Australia, or 03/5222 2900).

Along the route, the **Port Campbell Visitor Information Centre,** Port Campbell National Park, Morris Street, Port Campbell (✆ **03/5598 6382**), is a good place to pick up brochures. It has some interesting displays and an audiovisual show of the area, and also acts as a hotel-booking service for the area. It's open daily 9am to 5pm.

If you're approaching from the north, visit the **Camperdown Visitor Information Centre,** Court House, Manifold Street, Princes Highway, Camperdown (✆ **03/5593 3390**). It's open Monday through Friday 9:30am to 5pm, Saturday from 9:30am to 4pm, and Sunday from 11am to 4pm.

## WHERE TO STAY ALONG THE WAY

The **Great Ocean Road Accommodation Centre,** 136 Mountjoy Parade, Lorne (✆ **03/5289 1800**), rents cottages and units along the route. YHA Australia (www.yha.com.au) has hostels at Lorne, Port Campbell, and Port Fairy. **Lorne YHA** (✆ **03/5289 1809**) offers dorm beds for A$20 (US$16), doubles for A$50 (US$40), and family rooms for A$75 (US$60). **Port Campbell YHA** (✆ **03/5598 6305**) has dorm beds for A$20 (US$16), doubles for A$50 (US$40) and two self-contained cabins for A$128 (US$102). **Port Fairy YHA** (✆ **03/5568 2468**) has dorm beds for A$20 (US$16), doubles from A$48 to A$52 (US$38–US$42), and family rooms for A$65 to A$75 (US$52–US$60). Non-YHA members are charged an extra A$3.50 (US$2.80) per night.

### IN LORNE

Lorne is a good option for a night's rest. Though the beach is nothing special, it's a great place to learn to surf. There are plenty of restaurants and lots of boutiques.

**Great Ocean Road Cottages** *Kids* This complex has it all, although with so many people (and quite a few children) around, it can be a little noisy in summer. The self-contained cottages, set away from each other in a quiet patch of bushland, lie about a 5-minute walk from the town center. Each cottage is a two-story wooden hut with a double bed, two twin beds, and a pullout mattress. There's also a bathroom and a full kitchen. Just down the road is Waverley House, a historic mansion that holds seven apartments. All are air-conditioned; they vary enormously in size and furnishings.

Also on the property is **Great Ocean Road Backpackers** (www.yha.org.au), which offers dorm-style accommodations. It has 53 dorm beds, seven double rooms, and

four family rooms (each with a queen-size bed and two singles). The dorm beds cost A$20 (US$16) for YHA members and A$23 (US$18) for non-members; doubles go for A$25 (US$20) and A$30 (US$24), respectively; and family rooms rent for A$75 (US$60) and A$90 (US$72), respectively.

Great Ocean Road Cottages: 10 Erskine Ave. (P.O. Box 60), Lorne, VIC 3232. ✆ **03/5289 1070.** Fax 03/5289 2508. www.greatoceanroadcottages.com. Waverley House: Waverley Ave. and Great Ocean Rd. (P.O. Box 60), Lorne, VIC 3232. ✆ **03/5289 2044.** www.waverleyhouse.com. 10 cottages, 7 apts. A$150 (US$120) cottage weekday, A$170 (US$136) cottage weekend. Weekly stays only in high season (Dec 26–Jan 26). A$145 (US$116) 1-bed apt weekday, A$165 (US$132) weekend (A$180/US$144 daily high season); A$255 (US$204) 2-bed apt weekday, A$295 (US$236) weekend (A$330/US$264 daily high season). 2-night minimum on weekends. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Jacuzzi; free use of bikes; free laundry; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV/VCR, kitchen (in cottages), kitchenette (in apts), fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer.

### IN APOLLO BAY

**Bayside Gardens** Opposite the beach, with good ocean views from the front rooms, Bayside Gardens is a pleasant place to stay—and you can save money on meals by cooking in your own kitchen. Each unit has a separate bedroom with a double bed, a lounge area, kitchen, and attached bathroom with shower. Rooms at the front can be noisy if you're not used to living beside an ocean. There are wood fires in some of the units, and all rooms have central heating. Fry your fish on barbecues scattered around the grounds. It's a 10-minute walk to town.

219 Great Ocean Rd., Apollo Bay, VIC 3233. ✆/fax **03/5237 6248.** www.baysidegardens.com.au. 10 units. Feb–Dec A$70–A$110 (US$56–US$88) 1- and 2-bedroom apts. 1-week minimum Jan; A$980 (US$784) per week. Higher rates apply Jan, Easter, Christmas, and public holidays. MC, V. **Amenities:** Coin-op laundry; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* TV, kitchen, fridge.

### IN PORT CAMPBELL

**Macka's Farm** ★ *Finds* *Kids* This working farm is inland from the Twelve Apostles. The units all have kitchens, so you can cook your own feast. Otherwise, you can order meals by prior arrangement outside peak season or visit one of the nearby restaurants. Rooms sleep between six and eight in a mixture of singles and doubles. There's no TV—but who needs it when there are lots of pigs, cows, ducks, and chickens running around? Overall, it's a great farm experience.

2310 Princetown Rd., Princetown, VIC 3269. ✆ **03/5598 8261.** Fax 03/5598 8201. www.mackasfarm.com.au. 3 units. A$130–A$165 (US$104–US$132) double, depending on season (but check the website because there are dozens of different price categories). Extra person A$28 (US$22). MC, V. From the Twelve Apostles, go 2km (1¼ miles), turn at the sign for Macka's Farm, and go 4km (2½ miles) inland. *In room:* Kitchen, fridge, hair dryer.

## WHERE TO DINE IN LORNE

**Marks of Lorne** ★ INTERNATIONAL Lorne's best restaurant is a classy joint with simple wooden chairs and tables set in an elegant fashion in a cool, yellow-walled interior. Dishes include fried calamari salad, spicy octopus, risotto, and an oven-baked vine-wrapped goat cheese and macadamia nut parcel on eggplant pâté with red capsicum purée. The bar is open for coffee and drinks all day.

Mt. Joy Parade. ✆ **03/5289 2787.** Main courses A$12–A$23 (US$9.60–US$18). AE, MC, V. Daily noon–2:30pm and 6–9pm. Closed May and weekday lunch in winter.

**Ozone Milk Bar** *Value* AUSTRALIAN MILK BAR An Aussie icon, a milk bar is a kind of downmarket cafe that sells everything from shakes and pies to newspapers. This one sells good pies and quiche, a veggie burger I wouldn't recommend, chicken-filet burgers, cookies, ice cream, and small homemade cakes. The milkshakes are particularly

good. You can sit inside or around three tables outside. There's a Thai place next door, but it's very unwelcoming.

Mt. Joy Parade. ✆ **03/5289 1780.** Menu items A$1.80–A$4 (US$1.45–US$3.20). No credit cards. Daily 7am–6pm (until 11pm Dec 25–Jan).

## EXPLORING THE COASTAL ROAD

Along the route you might want to stop off at **Torquay,** a township dedicated to surfing. The main surf beach is much nicer than the one farther down the coast in Lorne. Check out **Surfworld Museum,** Surfcity Plaza, Beach Road, West Torquay (✆ **03/5261 4606**), which has interactive exhibits dealing with surfboard design and surfing history, and video of the world's best surfers. Admission is A$6.50 (US$5.20) for adults, A$4.50 (US$3.60) for children, and A$18 (US$14) for families. **Bells Beach,** just down the road, is world-famous in surfing circles for its perfect waves.

**Lorne** has some nice boutiques and is a good place to stop for lunch or stay the night. The stretch from Lorne to Apollo Bay is one of the most spectacular sections of the route; the road narrows and twists and turns along a cliff edge with the ocean on the other side. **Apollo Bay** is a pleasant town that was once a whaling station. It has good sandy beaches and is more low-key than Lorne.

Next you come to the **Angahook-Lorne State Park,** which protects most of the coastal section of the Otway Ranges from Aireys Inlet, south of Anglesea, to Kennett River. It has many well-marked rainforest walks and picnic areas at Shelly Beach, Elliot River, and Blanket Bay. There's plenty of wildlife around.

About 13km (8 miles) past Apollo Bay, just off the main road, you can stroll on the **Maits Rest Rainforest Boardwalk.** A bit farther along the main road, an unpaved road leads north past Hopetoun Falls and Beauchamp Falls to the settlement of **Beech Forest.** Seven kilometers (4⅓ miles) farther along the main road, another unpaved road heads south for 15km (9⅓ miles) to a windswept headland and the **Cape Otway Lighthouse.** Built by convicts in 1848, the 100m-tall (328-ft.) lighthouse is open to tourists. Admission is A$6.50 (US$5.20) for adults and A$3.50 (US$2.80) for children. It's open daily from 9am to 5pm. Ask about guided tours.

Back on the main road, your route heads inland through an area known as **Horden Vale** before running to the sea at Glenaire—there's good surfing and camping at **Johanna,** 6km (3¾ miles) north of here. Then the Great Ocean Road heads north again to **Lavers Hill,** a former timber town. Five kilometers (3 miles) southwest of Lavers Hill is small **Melba Gully State Park,** where you can spot glowworms at night and walk along routes of rainforest ferns. Keep an eye out for one of the last giant gum trees that escaped the loggers—it's some 27m (88 ft.) in circumference and is estimated to be more than 300 years old.

The next place of note is Moonlight Head, which marks the start of the **Shipwreck Coast**—a 120km (74-mile) stretch running to Port Fairy that claimed more than 80 ships in only 40 years at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th.

Just past Princetown starts the biggest attraction of the trip, **Port Campbell National Park** ★★. With its sheer cliffs and coastal rock sculptures, it's one of Australia's most immediately recognizable images. You can't miss the **Twelve Apostles,** a series of rock pillars standing in the foam just offshore. Other attractions are the **Blowhole,** which throws up huge sprays of water; the **Grotto,** a rock formation intricately carved by the waves; **London Bridge,** which looked quite like the real thing until the center crashed into the sea in 1990 (leaving a bunch of tourists stranded on the wrong end); and the **Loch Ard Gorge.**

**Port Fairy,** a lovely fishing town once called Belfast by Irish immigrants who settled here to escape the potato famine, is also on the Shipwreck Coast. Not far past the town of Peterborough, the Great Ocean Road heads inland to Warrnambool. It eventually joins the Princes Highway heading toward Adelaide.

## 3 The Murray River ★

Mildura: 544km (337 miles) NW of Melbourne; Albury-Wodonga: 305km (189 miles) NE of Melbourne; Echuca: 210km (130 miles) N of Melbourne

The Murray is Australia's version of the Mississippi River. Though it's a rushing torrent of white water at its source in the Snowy Mountains, it becomes slow and muddy brown by the time it forms the meandering border between Victoria and New South Wales. The Darling River, which starts in Queensland, feeds the Murray; together they make Australia's longest river.

Aborigines once used the Murray as a source of food and transportation, and later the water carried paddle steamers, laden with wool and crops from the land it helped irrigate. Explorers Hamilton Hume and William Howell "discovered" the Murray in 1842 on the first overland trek from Sydney to Port Phillip, near Melbourne. As Hume later wrote, on their trek the explorers "suddenly arrived at the bank of a very fine river—at least 60m wide, apparently deep, the bank being 2.4m or 2.7m above the level, which is overflowed at the time of flood . . . In the solid wood of a healthy tree I carved my name." You can still see the carved initials on a tree standing by the riverbank in Albury, on the border between the two states.

### ESSENTIALS

**GETTING THERE** Most visitors cross the river during an overland drive between cities. There are two ways to the Murray from Melbourne: the 2½-hour route down the Midland Highway to Echuca, and the Calder Highway to Mildura, a 6-hour drive. Traveling from Melbourne to Mildura is practical only if you're continuing to Broken Hill, which is 297km (184 miles) north of Mildura. Those in a hurry to get to and from Sydney can travel via the river-straddling twin towns of Albury and Wodonga on the Hume Highway (about a 12-hr. trip with short stops).

**V/Line** (✆ **13 61 96** in Victoria, or 03/9619 5000; www.vline.com.au) runs regular train service to Mildura, Echuca, and Albury-Wodonga.

**VISITOR INFORMATION** The **Echuca and Moama and District Visitor Information Centre,** 2 Heygarth St., Echuca, VIC 3564 (✆ **1800/804 446** in Australia, or 03/5480 7555; fax 03/5482 6413; www.echucamoama.com), has plenty of maps and information about accommodations and river cruises. It's open daily from 9am to 5pm. The **Mildura Visitor Information & Booking Centre,** 180–190 Deakin Ave., Mildura, VIC 3502 (✆ **1800/039 043** in Australia, or 03/5021 4424; fax 03/5021 1836; www.visitmildura.com.au), offers similar services. It's open Monday through Friday from 9am to 5:30pm and weekends from 9am to 5pm. If you're passing through Albury-Wodonga, contact the **Gateway Visitors Information Centre,** Gateway Village, Lincoln Causeway, Wodonga, VIC 3690 (✆ **1800/800 743** in Australia, or 02/6041 3875; fax 02/6021 0322). It's open daily from 9am to 5pm.

### RIVER CRUISES & OTHER FUN STUFF

**IN MILDURA** Mildura is one of Australia's most important fruit-growing areas. There was a time, however, when this was semiarid red-dust country. The area

bloomed because of a little ingenuity and, of course, the Murray. The original irrigation system consisted of two English water pumps and the manual labor of hundreds of immigrants, who were put to work clearing scrub and digging channels through the new fields. Today, the hungry land soaks up water.

Several paddle steamers leave from Mildura Wharf. One of the nicest boats is **PS *Melbourne*** (✆ **03/5023 2200;** fax 03/5021 3017; www.murrayriver.com.au), which was built in 1912 and is still powered by steam. It offers 2-hour trips leaving at 10:50am and 1:50pm daily (but check times in advance because they do change). The fare is A$19 (US$15) for adults, A$7.50 (US$6) for children, and free for kids under 5.

PS *Melbourne*'s sister ship, the ***Rothbury,*** was built in 1881; a conventional engine has replaced its steam engine. It offers a winery cruise every Thursday from 10:30am to 3:30pm, stopping at a winery for tastings and a barbecue lunch. The trip costs A$42 (US$34) for adults and A$20 (US$16) for children. The *Rothbury* has an evening dinner cruise Thursday from 7 to 10pm for A$40 (US$32) for adults and A$18 (US$14) for children. You can also take the paddleboat to the Golden River Zoo (see below) during school holiday periods; it leaves Mildura Wharf at 9:50am on Wednesday, returning at 3pm. The trip costs A$32 (US$25) for adults and A$16 (US$13) for children 5 to 14, including zoo admission.

On dry land, the **Golden River Zoo,** Flora Avenue, Mildura (✆ **03/5023 5540**), is a pleasant place to see native animals. The zoo fronts the river 4km (2½ miles) from the city center down 11th Street. The animals virtually follow you around (on the lookout for food) as you walk through their large enclosures. Admission is A$12 (US$9.60) for adults and A$6 (US$4.80) for children, including a barbecue lunch at noon, a tractor-train ride down to the river at 1:30pm, and an animal show. The zoo is open daily from 10am to 5pm; closed December 25.

**IN ECHUCA** The paddle steamer ***Emmylou*** (✆ **03/5480 2237;** fax 03/5480 2927; www.emmylou.com.au) operates out of Echuca. A 2-day, 2-night cruise leaves Wednesday at 6pm and returns at noon on Friday (check sailings beforehand). The cruise includes (depending on river levels) a visit to the Barmah, an area famous for its wetlands and the largest red gum trees in the world, or a stop at Perricoota Station. The trip costs A$415 to A$435 (US$332–US$348) per person. Children 4 to 14 receive a 25% discount. An overnight trip leaves on Saturday at 6pm and returns at 10am on Sunday. It costs A$195 to A$210 (US$156–US$168) per person, including breakfast; dinner is extra. The *Emmylou* also offers day trips costing A$15 (US$12) for adults and A$7.50 (US$6) for kids for 1 hour, and A$18 (US$14) for adults and A$9 (US$7.20) for kids for 1½ hours.

The **Port of Echuca** (✆ **03/5482 4248;** www.portofechuca.org.au) is definitely worth a look. The three-level red-gum wharf was built in 1865 and is still in use by paddle steamers. The Port owns PS *Adelaide,* the oldest operating wooden-hulled paddle steamer in the world (1866), PS *Pevensey* (1911), and PS *Alexander Arbuthnot* (1923). One-hour cruises on the latter two, including a port tour, run daily at 10:15, 11:30am, 1, 2:15, and 3:30pm (though ring ahead to check, as they do change). They cost A$24 (US$19) for adults, A$13 (US$10) for children, and A$60 (US$48) for families. You can look around the wharf on a guided tour, priced at A$12 (US$9.60) for adults and A$7.50 (US$6) for children, and A$33 (US$26) for families. Outside the Port, the Echuca Port Precinct offers various things to do, including carriage rides and old penny arcade machines in Sharpes Magic Movies, in an old riverboat warehouse.

**A TRIP INTO THE OUTBACK** **Mungo National Park** ★ is a unique, arid region 110km (68 miles) northeast of Mildura, off the Sturt Highway. The park is famous for its red sand dunes and shifting sands, and I highly recommend you see it. You can get there on your own, but it's best to have a four-wheel-drive vehicle. People come here to see the Walls of China, a moonscape of intricately weathered red sand. The walls edge Lake Mungo, once a huge freshwater lake during the last Ice Age, now dry. A 60km (37-mile) driving tour starting at the visitor center at the park's entrance takes you across the lakebed to the Walls of China. Several short walks begin at the campsites at the park entrance. Call the **NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service** (✆ **1300/361 967** in Australia, or 02/9995 5000; www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au) for more information on Mungo. Just outside the park, the **Mungo Lodge** (✆ **03/5029 7297;** www.mungolodge.com.au) offers affordable motel accommodations and a casual restaurant. An interesting option, if you have the money, is a 5-night tour of the Outback with **Discover Australia** (✆ **1800/73 2001** in Australia, or 08/9486 7880, www.discoveraustralia.com.au). The tour leaves Broken Hill in New South Wales and costs A$1,660 (US$1,328) twin share including accommodations, meals, fees, and air-conditioned four-wheel-drive transport.

## ACCOMMODATIONS YOU CAN AFFORD

### IN MILDURA

**Mildura Grand Hotel** ★★★ This huge 19th-century hotel is right in the center of Mildura, overlooking the Murray River. Double rooms are comfortable, and many have been refurbished. Suites are bigger, and some have balconies and garden views. State suites are plush and come with a king-size bed. The Presidential suite (the most expensive) is Art Deco inspired, with a large marble bathroom and Jacuzzi. This place is famous for Stefano's, the restaurant of celeb chef Stefano di Pietri. Voted best restaurant in Victoria in 2002, the place offers a set menu of five to six courses for A$66 (US$53), featuring the best local produce.

Seventh St., Mildura, VIC 3500. ✆ **1800/034 228** in Australia, or 03/5023 0511. Fax 03/5022 1801. www.mildura grandhotel.com. 102 units. A$110–A$143 (US$88–US$114) double; A$176–A$462 (US$141–US$369) suite. Rates include breakfast. Extra person A$22 (US$18). Ask about packages. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 3 restaurants; 4 bars; large heated outdoor pool; golf course nearby; access to nearby health club, Jacuzzi, sauna; 24-hr. concierge; shopping arcade; 24-hr. room service; in-room massage; laundry service; dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

### IN ECHUCA

**Echuca Gardens B&B and YHA** This popular two-story log cabin B&B offers evening gatherings around the piano, as well as a Jacuzzi in the front yard surrounded by murals and landscaped water gardens. Rooms are decorated in native flower themes, and all have balconies. It's a short stroll from the B&B to either the river or a state forest. The YHA next door has a basic twin room and two dorm rooms, each with four beds. Dorm beds go for A$20 (US$16), and the double room costs A$45 (US$36). Non-YHA members are charged an extra A$3.50 (US$2.80) per night.

103 Mitchell St., Echuca, VIC 3564. ✆ **03/5480 6522** or 0419/881 054 mobile. Fax 03/5482 6951. www.echuca gardens.com, or www.yha.com.au. 3 B&B units, 3 hostel units. B&B room A$150 (US$120) weekends, A$130 (US$104) weekdays. Rates include breakfast. MC, V. **Amenities:** Jacuzzi; sauna; bike rental; tour desk; massage; coin-operated laundry; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer.

## 4 Ned Kelly Country

The Australian legend Ned Kelly, the eldest of eight children, was born to Irish parents in Victoria in 1854. At the age of 12 his ex-convict father died and his family settled near relatives at Greta, 240km (149 miles) northeast of Melbourne.

Like many other poor families, the Kellys took up the government's offer of cheap land. As part of the deal they had to clear the bushland, build a house, and plant crops. More often than not the land parcels were too small and the soil too poor to make them a living. The only recourse for many of them was to steal horses and cows from wealthy landowners, who owned huge tracts of the best land.

At 16, Ned Kelly was convicted of horse-rustling and sentenced to three years in jail. A few years later his mother was imprisoned for allegedly attacking a police officer named Fitzpatrick, who in turn was accused of attacking Ned's sister first. During the scuffle, Ned shot Fitzpatrick through the wrist. Ned escaped—with a bounty on his head.

On October 26, 1878, together with friends Joe Byrne and Steve Hart, Ned and his brother came across police camped at Stringy Bark Creek. Ned believed the police intended to kill him and his brother, so he called on them to surrender. Three officers resisted, and in the fight that followed, Kelly shot them dead.

In the years that followed, Ned and his gang avoided capture with the help of locals, who sympathized with their situation. During this time, the Kelly Gang robbed two banks, and during each robbery Ned gave one of his hostages a letter, explaining to the government how he'd been persecuted by police.

Then, in June 1880, Ned made his last stand. Police surrounded the Kelly Gang at the Glenrowan Hotel. Prepared for the fight, the four bushrangers put on suits of armor made from steel. It was no use. Twenty-eight bullets penetrated Ned's body. But, unlike the others in the gang, he survived. He was hanged in Melbourne Gaol on November 11, 1880. He was 25 years old.

If you're driving down from Sydney to Melbourne, then I really suggest you spend a few days exploring the region before making a side trip to the High Country. If you're driving down from Sydney, you might want to stay the night in a two-bedroom cabin at the **Gundagai Tourist Park** (✆ **02/6944 1620**), in Gundagai (about a 4-hr. drive from Sydney). Cabins cost from A$72 (US$58) a night. Another option is a night at the wonderful **King River Stables** ★★ (✆ **03/5721 8195**) in Wangaratta (about a 6½-hr. drive from Sydney). This set of beautifully converted former horse stables are set among fields full of cows and horses. The lounge room stares out across an enormous billabong. It costs A$125 (US$100) for a double, with breakfast.

Use Wangaratta as a base to discover Ned Kelly Country. A short hop from Wangaratta is Milawa, where quite a few wineries offer cellar-door tastings along the **Milawa Gourmet Trail** (www.milawagourmet.com). There is also the interesting **Milawa Cheese Company** (Factory Rd., Milawa; ✆ **03/5727 3588**). Pick up some local cheeses, chutneys, and meats for a picnic lunch here, or eat in the nice cafe.

Close by is historic **Beechworth,** one of Victoria's best-preserved gold-rush towns. There are more than 30 buildings listed by the National Trust here, including pubs, churches, government offices, miners' cottages, and the jail where Ned Kelly was imprisoned. The delightful Beechworth Bakery, on the main road, offers a nice selection of cakes, pies, and pastries.

You can also visit **Glenrowan,** a quiet little town surrounded by more wineries and orchards. Here you'll find a 6m-high (20-ft.) outdoor statue of Ned Kelly clad in his

homemade armor and helmet, with rifle in hand. Worth a look is **Kate's Cottage Museum** (✆ **03/5766 2448**), which contains a vast collection of Kelly memorabilia and an authentic replica of the Kelly homestead, complete with furnishings. Meanwhile, **Kellyland** (✆ **03/5766 2367**) is an animated theatrical portrayal of the Kelly Gang's final stand, which uses original props including an authentic handgun once owned by Ned Kelly. The show lasts about 40 minutes and commences every half-hour from 9:30am to 4:30pm daily.

You could combine Milawa, Beechworth, and Glenrowan in a packed day trip, before heading back to Wangaratta or onward to Bright.

## BRIGHT

310km (193 miles) NE of Melbourne; 700km (435 miles) SW of Sydney; 74km (46 miles) E of Wangaratta

Set in a valley and surrounded by pine forests, Bright offers good access to the surrounding High Country and ski fields. The town is famous for the colors of its European trees in fall. There are nice walks around here, especially along the pretty Ovens River, while another option is to hire bicycles and take off through the countryside down a former railway track. Cycling at least part of the so-called **Rail Trail** ★ (www.railtrail.com.au) will give you a nice feel for the area, with its surrounding mountains, farms, and river. The track stretches 94km (58 miles) from Bright to Wangaratta, but you can turn back whenever you want, of course. Hire bikes (and skis if you're off to the snowfields) in Bright.

### ESSENTIALS

**GETTING THERE** V/Line trains (✆ **13 61 96** in Victoria, 13 22 32 in New South Wales, or 03/9619 5000; www.vline.com.au) run between Melbourne and Bright, via Wangaratta, daily. Round-trip fares cost A$95 (US$76), though if you travel in off-peak times it costs A$48 (US$38) round-trip. However, it's difficult to get around here without your own transport.

**VISITOR INFORMATION** The Bright Visitors Centre, 119 Gavan St., Bright, VIC 3741 (✆ **03/5755 2275;** www.brightescapes.com.au), is open 8:30am to 5pm.

### WHERE TO STAY & DINE

The website www.alpinelink.com.au offers a thorough list of places to stay in Bright. The best place to eat in town is **Simone's of Bright** (98 Gavan St.; ✆ **03/5755 2266**). It serves up great Italian food in a refined atmosphere, with main courses around A$18 to A$25 (US$14–US$20). Otherwise, Bright has plenty of family-friendly cafes, restaurants, and pizza joints.

**Alinga Longa Lodge** The large two-bedroom units here are in need of an update, but they are comfortable enough for a couple of days, especially if you're traveling with kids. The full kitchen means you never have to eat out!

12 Gavan St. (Great Alpine Rd.), Bright, VIC 3741. ✆ **03/5755 1073.** www.alingalongaholidays.com.au. 6 units. A$90–A$120 (US$72–US$96) double. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Small outdoor swimming pool; free bikes and toboggans; children's playground; tour desk; laundry. *In room:* TV, kitchen.

## 5 The High Country

Victoria's High Country consists of the hills and mountains of the Great Dividing Range, which runs from Queensland, through New South Wales, to just before Ballarat, where it drops away and reappears in the mountains of the Grampians, in the

western part of Victoria. The range separates inland Australia from the greener coastal belt. The highest peak in the Victoria segment of the range is Mt. Bogong which, at just 1,988m (6,521 ft.), is minuscule by world mountain standards.

The main attractions of the High Country are its natural features, which include moorland and typical mountainous alpine scenery. It's also popular for outdoor activities, including hiking, canoeing, white-water rafting, mountain-bike riding, and rock climbing. The High Country is also the home of the Victorian ski fields, based around Mt. Buller, Mt. Stirling, Falls Creek, Mt. Buffalo, and Mt. Hotham. If you plan to go walking here, make sure you have plenty of water and sunscreen, as well as a tent and a good-quality sleeping bag. As in any alpine region, temperatures can plummet dramatically. In summer, days can be very hot and nights very cold.

## SNOWY RIVER NATIONAL PARK ★

390km (242 miles) NE of Melbourne

The Snowy River National Park, with its lovely river scenery and magnificent gorges, protects Victoria's largest forest wilderness areas. The Snowy River was once a torrent worthy of Banjo Paterson's famous poem, but since Snowy Mountain Hydro-Electric erected a series of dams, it's become a mere trickle of its former self.

**GETTING THERE & GETTING AROUND** There is no public transit in this area. The two main access roads are the Gelantipy Road from Buchan and the Bonang Freeway from the logging township of Orbost. MacKillop's Road (also known as Deddick River Rd.) runs across the park's northern border from Bonang to a little south of Wulgulmerang. The area around MacKillop's Bridge, along MacKillop's Road, has spectacular scenery and the park's best campgrounds, set beside some nice swimming holes and sandy river beaches. The Barry Way leads through the main township of Buchan, where you'll find some of Australia's best caves.

**VISITOR INFORMATION** The main place to get information on the Snowy River National Park and Alpine National Park is the **Buchan Caves Information Centre,** in the Buchan Caves complex. It's open daily from 9am to 4pm (closed Dec 25). Or call **Parks Victoria** (✆ **13 19 63** in Victoria, or 03/5155 9264).

### EXPLORING THE BUCHAN CAVES

The **Buchan Caves** ★ (✆ **03/5155 9264**) are in a scenic valley that is particularly beautiful in autumn, when all the European trees are losing their leaves. Tourists can visit the Royal and Fairy caves (which are quite similar), with their fabulous stalactites and stalagmites. There are several tours daily: April to September at 11am, 1, and 3pm; October to March at 10, 11:15am, 1, 2:15, and 3:30pm. Admission to one cave costs A$10 (US$8) for adults, A$5 (US$4) for children 5 to 16, and A$25 (US$20) for families of five. To reach the caves from the Princes Highway, turn off at Nowa Nowa (it's well signposted). If you're coming south from Jindabyne in New South Wales, follow the Barry Way, which runs alongside the Snowy River.

## ALPINE NATIONAL PARK ★★

333km (206 miles) NE of Melbourne; 670km (415 miles) SW of Sydney

Victoria's largest national park, at 646,000 hectares (1,595,620 acres), the Alpine National Park connects the High Country areas of New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory. The park's scenery is spectacular, encompassing most of the state's highest mountains, wild rivers, impressive escarpments, forests, and high plains.

Much of the park was devastated by horrific bushfires in December 2002, and it is slowly recovering. It's green, but evidence of the fire lingers; you'll still see blackened tree trunks. The flora is diverse; in all, some 1,100 plant species have been recorded within the park's boundaries, including 12 not found anywhere else. Walking here is particularly good in spring and summer, when a carpet of wildflowers covers the Bogong High Plains. Other impressive walking trails include the 5.7km (3.5-mile) route through Bryce Gorge to The Bluff, a 200m-high (356-ft.) rocky escarpment with panoramic views. Of the numerous other walking trails in the park, the best known is the Alpine Walking Track, which bisects the park for 400km (248 miles) from Walhalla to the township of Tom Groggin, on the New South Wales border. There are plenty of access roads into the park, some of which close in winter.

If you are a keen walker, you could see the area by foot. **Ecotrek** (✆ **08/8383 7198;** www.ecotrek.com.au) offers an 8-day Bogong Alpine Traverse trek, including 4 nights camping and 3 nights in ski lodges. You carry your own pack, but the pain is worth it for the incredible panoramic views of peaks, plains, and forested valleys. The trek costs A$1,420 (US$1,136) per person, including round-trip transport to Melbourne.

Horseback-riding treks are another option for seeing the area. **Stoney's High Country** ★★ (✆ **03/5775 2212;** www.stoneys.com.au) acts as a one-stop shop for local tour operators offering trail rides. A 2-hour ride in the foothills costs A$50 (US$40); a day ride to higher elevations, A$180 (US$144); a weekend ride, around A$380 (US$304); and a 7-day ride, A$1,610 (US$1,288). Longer rides generally take place on specific dates—check the website. Stoney's can also help you organize a custom ride, on dates of your choice. Longer tours generally include camping, food, and just about everything else, though you should check if you'll need a sleeping bag.

**GETTING THERE** Routes from Melbourne include the Great Alpine Road (B500), the Kiewa Valley Highway (C531), and the Lincoln Road from Heyfield. The Bluff is accessible from Mansfield along the Maroodah Highway.

## HITTING THE SLOPES: THE HIGH COUNTRY SKI RESORTS

Most of **Victoria's ski areas** ★ are in, or on the edge of, the Alpine National Park (see above). The ski season in the Victorian High Country is June through October, with July and August the most popular months.

### MT. HOTHAM

373km (231 miles) NE of Melbourne

Mt. Hotham (1,750m/5,740 ft.) is an intimate ski resort significantly smaller than those at Falls Creek (see below). There are eight lifts serving runs from beginner to advanced. The resort also offers some good off-piste (off-trail) cross-country skiing, including a route across the Bogong High Plains to Falls Creek. Some of the lifts are quite far apart, although there's a free "zoo cart" and bus transport system in winter along the main road. Resort admission costs A$27 (US$22) per car for a day, payable at the entry gates or at the Mount Hotham Resort Management office (see "Visitor Information," below). Ski tickets are available from Mount Hotham Skiing Company (✆ **03/5759 4444**). Full-day lift tickets cost A$85 (US$68) for adults and A$44 (US$35) for children.

**GETTING THERE** From Melbourne, take the Hume Highway via Harrietville, or the Princes Highway via Omeo. The trip takes 5½ hours (the Hume Hwy. is slightly

quicker). **Qantas** (✆ **13 13 13** in Australia, or 800/227-4500 in the U.S. and Canada) flies to Mt. Hotham Airport from Melbourne and Sydney.

**Trekset Mount Hotham Snow Service** (✆ **03/9370 9055**) runs buses to Mt. Hotham daily during the ski season. They depart Melbourne's Spencer Street Coach Terminal at 9am. The trip takes 6 hours and costs A$125 (US$100) for adults and A$60 (US$48) for children under 15 for a round-trip. There are also coaches from Wangaratta and Bright to Mt. Hotham. You need to book in advance.

**VISITOR INFORMATION** **Mount Hotham Resort Management,** Great Alpine Road, Mt. Hotham, VIC 3699 (✆ **03/5759 3550**), is as close as you'll come to an information office. It has plenty of brochures. It's open daily from 8am to 5pm during ski season, and Monday through Friday from 9am to 5pm at other times. The general Mt. Hotham website is **www.mthotham.com.au**.

**WHERE TO STAY** The **Mt. Hotham Accommodation Service** (✆ **1800/032 061** in Australia; www.mthothamaccommodation.com.au) can book rooms and advise you on special deals, including flights. Another option is **Falls Creek Reservations Centre** (✆ **1800/453 525** in Australia). During the ski season, most places will want you to book for a week. Prices are significantly lower in the non-ski season.

## FALLS CREEK

375km (233 miles) NE of Melbourne

One of Victoria's best ski resorts, and my favorite, Falls Creek is on the edge of the Bogong High Plains overlooking the Kiewa Valley. This compact alpine village is the only one in Australia where you can ski from your lodge to the lifts and back again from the ski slopes. The nightlife is also very good in the ski season, with plenty of party options as well as a range of walk-in lodge restaurants.

The ski fields are in two parts, the Village Bowl and Sun Valley, with 17 lifts covering more than 90 trails. There are plenty of intermediate and advanced runs, as well as a few for beginners. You'll also find some of Australia's best cross-country skiing; Australia's major cross-country skiing event, the Kangaroo Hoppet, takes place here on the last Saturday in August every year. Admission to the resort costs A$25 (US$20) per person.

Full-day lift tickets cost A$85 (US$68) for adults and A$44 (US$35) for children. Combined lift and ski-rental tickets are also available (roughly twice as expensive). Call the **Falls Creek Ski Lifts** (✆ **03/5758 3280**) for details and to book accommodations.

Falls Creek is a pleasant place to visit in summer, when you can go bushwalking, horseback riding, and trout fishing. **Angling Expeditions** (✆/fax **03/5754 1466**) is the best option for fly-fishing for trout in the alpine area during spring, summer, and fall. Trips last from 3 hours to all day and are suitable for everyone from beginners to experts. Overnight trips are also available. Horseback-riding operators include **Falls Creek Trail Rides** (✆ **03/5758 3655**) and **Bogong Horseback Adventures** (✆ **03/5754 4849**).

**GETTING THERE** **Pyles Coaches** (✆ **03/5754 4024;** www.pyles.com.au) runs buses to the ski resort from Melbourne every day during the ski season (end of June to end of Sept), departing Melbourne at 9am and Falls Creek at 5pm. The round-trip fare is A$130 (US$104) for adults and A$98 (US$78) for children under 16 and includes the resort admission fee. The company also runs shuttle buses to and from Albury, just over the border in New South Wales and accessible by train or air from

Sydney; and between Mt. Beauty and Falls Creek. A round-trip costs A$72 (US$58) for adults and A$62 (US$50) for kids. Reservations are essential.

If you're driving from Melbourne, take the Hume Highway to Wangaratta, and then through Myrtleford and Mt. Beauty to Falls Creek. The trip takes around 4½ hours. From Sydney, take the Hume Highway to Albury-Wodonga and follow the signs to Mt. Beauty and the snowfields. If you arrive in the ski season, a resort worker will direct you to a parking lot and bring you back in a little buggy to the resort entrance, from where you can take a caterpillar-tracked Oversnow taxi to your hotel. It costs A$14 (US$11) one-way and A$25 (US$20) round-trip for adults, and A$9.30 (US$7.45) one-way and A$17 (US$14) round-trip for children 5 to 15. Or you could attempt the short but (probably) slippery walk yourself.

**VISITOR INFORMATION** The **Falls Creek Information Centre,** 1 Bogong High Plains Rd., Falls Creek, VIC 3649 (✆ **03/5758 3490;** www.fallscreek.com.au), is open daily from 8am to 5pm. Buy lift tickets in the booth next door between mid-June and October. The website has good general information and lists ski ticket prices.

## Where to Stay & Dine

Falls Creek is a year-round resort with a good range of accommodations. It tends to fill up fast during the ski season, when room rates are much higher. The **Falls Creek Reservation Centre** (✆ **1800/453 525** in Australia, or 03/5758 3100; fax 03/5758 3337; www.fallscreek.net) can tell you about available deals and book rooms.

**Alpha Lodge** Budget holidaymakers will find good-value rooms in this warm and friendly alpine lodge. Rooms are comfy enough for the price; some are perfect for families. There's a TV lounge, a modern communal kitchen, and a sauna. Like elsewhere, the prices skyrocket when it snows, but for a summer stopover, they're fine.

5 Parallel St., Falls Creek, VIC 3699. ✆ **03/5758 3488.** Fax 03/5758 3643. www.alphaskilodge.com.au. Winter A$220 (US$176) double midweek; A$480 (US$384) double Friday or Saturday. Summer A$68 (US$54) double or family room. Kids under 15 A$16 (US$13) extra. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Sauna. *In room:* No phone.

**Viking Lodge** ★ Fine views from the lounge, a nice atmosphere, and modern, bright rooms and public spaces—this is what a great budget alpine lodge is all about. There's a communal kitchen, a sun deck with a barbecue, and rock-bottom prices in summer.

13 Parallel St., Falls Creek, VIC 3699. ✆ **03/5758 3247.** Fax 03/5758 3483. www.vikinglodge.com.au. Winter A$108–A$200 (US$86–US$160) double. A$50–A$140 (US$40–US$112) extra for kids 11–15; A$25–A$80 (US$20–US$64) extra for kids 2–10. Rates depend on what month you ski (end of July to beginning of Sept most expensive). Summer A$70 (US$56) double. A$25 (US$20) extra adult, A$13 (US$10) extra child under 16. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Lounge room; separate TV lounge; kitchen. *In room:* Hair dryer.

### A WINTER SPLURGE

**Feathertop Alpine Lodge** ★ *Finds* I really like this pleasant old-fashioned winter ski lodge nestled among the gum trees. Hosts Pip and Mark Whittaker have made it into one of the friendliest getaways in the mountains, and its relatively small size makes it easy for you to get to know other guests. Rooms are functional yet cozy and sleep two to four people. Standard rooms have a double or twin singles, and no TV. Classic rooms have either a king- or queen-size bed and a TV. All have showers attached. The lounge room is large and comfortable, with good views, a well-stocked bar, and a library.

Parallel St. (P.O. Box 259), Falls Creek, VIC 3699. ✆ **03/5758 3232.** Fax 03/5758 3514. www.ski.com.au/feathertop. 10 units. Winter A$180–A$260 (US$144–US$208) standard double; A$200–A$290 (US$160–US$232) classic double.

Rates include dinner and breakfast. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; lounge with bar, golf course nearby; 4 tennis courts (summer); health club nearby; children's center; tour and activities desk; business center; babysitting; coin-op laundry; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* TV (in some).

## MT. BUFFALO NATIONAL PARK ★★

350km (217 miles) NE of Melbourne

Based around Mt. Buffalo, this is the oldest (1898) national park in the Victorian High Country. The scenery is spectacular, with huge granite outcrops and plenty of waterfalls. As you ascend the mountain you pass through dramatic vegetation changes, from tall snow gum forests to subalpine grasslands. In summer, carpets of silver snow daisies, royal bluebells, and yellow Billy Button flowers bloom on the plateau. Animals and birds include wallabies, wombats, cockatoos, lyrebirds, and mobs of crimson rosellas, which congregate around the campsite at Lake Catani (popular for swimming and canoeing). Other favorite sports include advanced hang gliding and serious rock climbing. There are also more than 90km (56 miles) of walking trails. The area is regenerating after bushfires in late 2002.

Mt. Buffalo is also home to Victoria's smallest ski resort, with just five lifts and a vertical drop of 157m (515 ft.). There are also 11km (6¾ miles) of marked cross-country ski trails. There's also a good toboggan slope for kids opposite the ski lifts.

**ADMISSION FEES & LIFT TICKETS** A day pass for admission into Mt. Buffalo ski resort is A$14 (US$11) per car in ski season, A$9.50 (US$7.60) otherwise. Two-day and 3-day passes are also available. Full-day lift tickets cost around A$57 (US$46) for adults, A$34 (US$27) for children under 14. A family ticket costs A$154 (US$123). Combination lift and ski-lesson packages are available. Buy lift tickets at the park offices (✆ **13 19 63** in Victoria, or 03/5756 2328) from 9am to 3pm.

**GETTING THERE** From Melbourne or Sydney take the Hume Highway to Wangaratta, then follow the Great Alpine Road to Porepunkah, just before Bright. From there follow the Mt. Buffalo Tourist Road up the hill (about 1 hr.).

**VISITOR INFORMATION** The nearest center is the **Bright Visitors Centre,** 119 Gavan St., Bright, VIC 3741 (✆ **03/5755 2275;** www.brightescapes.com.au), open daily 8:30am to 5pm.

### WHERE TO STAY

**Mt. Buffalo Chalet** ★★ *Finds* This rambling mountain guesthouse was built in 1910 and retains a wonderful old-world feel. Standard rooms are small with a comfortable bed and share a bathroom. Classic rooms are small but have their own bathrooms. Heritage rooms are larger, with a nice old-time feel; some have good views (ask for a Heritage View room). Tower rooms have excellent park views and are popular with honeymooners. Treetop rooms, which also have great views, are set apart from the main building. These also have a kitchenette and separate lounge, which makes them good for small families. The property has a large lounge room and a billiards room, both with open fireplaces. Rates are highest from Christmas to mid-January and over Easter weekend; lower rates apply in autumn and spring.

The associated **Cresta Lodge** (✆ **03/5755 1500;** www.mtbuffalochalet.com.au) reopened in 2005. Nice rooms here costs from A$96 to A$198 (US$77–US$158) for a double, depending on view and season.

Mt. Buffalo National Park, VIC 3740. ✆ **1800/037 038** in Australia, or 03/5755 1500. Fax 03/5755 1892. www.mtbuffalochalet.com.au. 97 units, 72 with bathroom (some with shower only). A$100–A$150 (US$80–US$120) double in standard room; A$140–A$200 (US$112–US$160) double in classic room; A$190–A$300 (US$152–US$240) double

in Heritage View room; A$210–A$320 (US$168–US$256) double in Tower room; A$240–A$350 (US$192–US$280) double in Treetop room. Rates include park admission. Children's rates 50% less. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; 2 grass tennis courts; exercise room; Jacuzzi; sauna; canoe rental; bike rental; kids' club (weekends and school holidays); game room; activities desk; massage; babysitting; coin-op laundry; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* Kitchenette (in some), fridge, coffeemaker.

## 6 The Northwest: Grampians National Park

260km (161 miles) NW of Melbourne

One of Victoria's most popular attractions, the rugged **Grampians National Park** rises some 1,000m (3,280 ft.) from the plains, appearing from the distance like some kind of monumental island. The park, which is an ecological meeting place of Victoria's western volcanic plains and the forested Great Dividing Range, contains one-third of all the wildflowers native to Victoria and most of the surviving Aboriginal rock art in southeastern Australia. Almost 200 species of birds, 35 species of mammals, 28 species of reptiles, 11 species of amphibians, and 6 species of freshwater fish have been discovered here. Kangaroos, koalas, emus, gliders, and echidnas are easy to spot.

The main town in the Grampians is Halls Gap, which is in a valley between the southern tip of the Mt. Difficult Range and the northern tip of the Mt. William Range. It's a good place to stock up on supplies. The Wonderland Range, with its stunning scenery, is close to Halls Gap, too. There are plenty of short strolls, and longer bushwalks are available.

A must-do stop is the **Brambuk Aboriginal Living Cultural Centre** ★ (✆ **03/5356 4452**), adjacent to the park visitor center (see below). It offers an excellent introduction to the area's Aboriginal history and accessible rock-art sites. A 15-minute movie highlighting local Aboriginal history costs A$4.40 (US$3.50) for adults and A$2.50 (US$2) for children. Otherwise, admission to the center is free. The center is open daily from 10am to 5pm.

### ESSENTIALS

**GETTING THERE** By car, the park is accessible from the Western Highway at Ararat, Stawell (pronounced *Storl*), and Horsham. Alternatively, you can reach the southern entrance from the Glenelg Highway at Dunkeld. The western areas of the park are off the Henty Highway (A200).

**V/Line** (✆ **13 61 96** in Victoria, or 03/9619 5000; www.vline.com.au) has daily train and bus service to Halls Gap from Melbourne. (The train goes to Stawell, and a bus continues to Halls Gap.) The trip takes around 4 hours.

**GETTING AROUND** Paved roads include the **Grampians Tourist Road,** which cuts through the park from Dunkeld to Halls Gap; the **Mt. Victory Road,** from Halls Gap to Wartook; and the **Roses Gap Road,** which runs from Wartook across to Dadswells Bridge on the Western Highway. Many other roads in the park are unpaved, but most are passable with a two-wheel-drive car.

**Autopia Tours** (✆ **03/9419 8878;** www.autopiatours.com.au) offers all-day tours of the park and surrounds from Melbourne, leaving every Monday, Wednesday, and Saturday (call ahead to check departure times and pick-up points). The tour stops at Aboriginal rock-art sites, waterfalls, and lookouts. Not much walking is involved, but you certainly get the chance to spot native animals and ferret around among the native flora. The tour includes lunch and morning and afternoon tea, and costs A$70 (US$56).

**VISITOR INFORMATION** The **Grampians National Park Visitor Centre** (✆ **03/5356 4379**), 2.5km (1½ miles) south of Halls Gap, is open daily from 9am to 5pm. It has plenty of maps and brochures, and the rangers can advise you on walking trails and camping spots. Check out www.visitgrampians.com.au.

## WHERE TO STAY

You can rent a caravan (trailer) or a cabin for the night at **Halls Gap Lakeside Caravan Park** (✆ **03/5356 4281;** www.hallsgaplakeside.com.au), 5km (3 miles) from town on the shores of Lake Bellfield. Caravans and cabins cost A$52 to A$125 (US$42–US$100).

There's a good **YHA hostel** in Halls Gap, on the corner of Buckler Street and Grampians Road (✆ **03/5356 4544;** www.yha.com.au). Dorms cost A$23 to A$24 (US$18–US$19), and double rooms A$57 to A$60 (US$46–US$48). It's an extra A$3.50 (US$2.80) a night if you're not a YHA member.

**The Mountain Grand Guesthouse** This old-fashioned guesthouse maintains a comfortable AAA-rated three-and-a-half-star standard. These days it's promoting itself as a business retreat, and tourists get all the benefits of the corporate extras, such as exceptional service. Some rooms are quite small, with country-style furniture and double beds. There are also larger rooms, some of which have Jacuzzis. The Balconies Restaurant overlooks the garden and valley. The owner is a keen musician, and on Saturday night, professional musicians provide music to dine by. Later, they move downstairs to the Limelight Cafe/Bar and play till late.

Main Rd., town center, Halls Gap, Grampians, VIC 3381. ✆ **03/5356 4232.** Fax 03/5356 4254. www.mountaingrand.com.au. 13 units. A$130 (US$104) double with breakfast; A$196 (US$157) double with lunch, dinner, and breakfast. 2-night minimum on weekends. AE, DC, MC, V. Children not accepted. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; 2 bars; free laundry. *In room:* A/C, fridge, coffeemaker, iron.

# 14

# Canberra

*by Marc Llewellyn*

If you mention you're heading to Canberra (pronounced "*can*-bra," with very open vowels), most Australians will raise an eyebrow and say, "Why bother?" Even many Canberrans will admit that it's a great place to live, but they wouldn't want to visit.

So what is it about Canberra (pop. 310,000) that draws so much lackluster comment? Simply put, Australians aren't used to having things so nice and ordered. In many ways, Canberra is like Washington, D.C., or any other town that was a planned community. Some see its virtues as bland: The roads are wide and in good order, the buildings are modern, and the suburbs are pleasant and leafy. Canberra is the seat of government and the home of thousands of civil servants—enough to make almost any free-thinking, individualist Aussie shudder.

But to me, Canberra's differences are the very things that make it special. The streets aren't clogged with traffic, and there are plenty of opportunities for safe biking—try that in almost any other city center and you'll be dusting the sides of cars and pushed onto the sidewalks in no time. Canberra has plenty of open spaces, parklands, and monuments, and an awful lot to see and do—from museum and gallery hopping to ballooning with a champagne glass in your hand or boating on Lake Burley Griffin. You can pack a lot into a few days.

Canberra was born after the Commonwealth of Australia was created in 1901. Melbourne and Sydney, even then jockeying for preeminence, each bid to become the capital. In the end, Australian leaders decided to follow the example of their U.S. counterparts by creating a federal district; in 1908 they chose an area between the two cities.

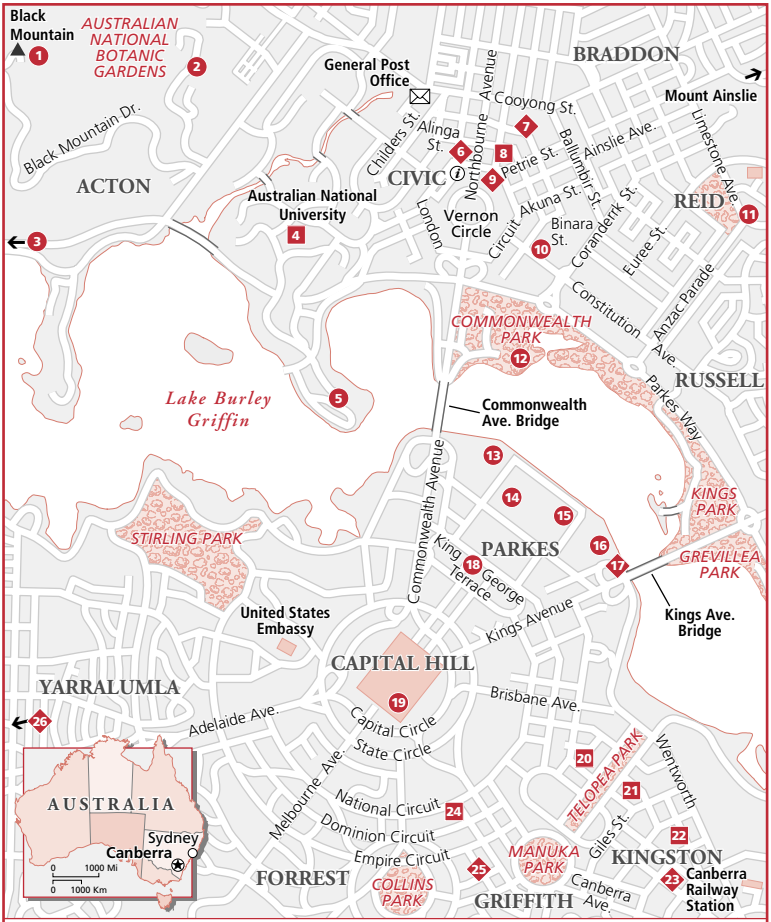
Designing the new capital fell to Chicago landscape architect Walter Burley Griffin, a contemporary of Frank Lloyd Wright. The city he mapped out was christened Canberra (a local Aboriginal word meaning "meeting place"), and by 1927, the first meeting of parliament took place. The business of government was under way.

Originally the land that became Canberra was predominantly grass plains. Over the years millions of trees have been planted in and around the city, earning it the nickname "the bush capital." Unfortunately, massive bushfires in January 2003 destroyed much of the surrounding forest and more than 500 homes in the suburbs.

## 1 Orientation

### ARRIVING

**BY PLANE** **Qantas** (✆ **13 13 13** in Australia, or 800/227-4500 in the U.S. and Canada) runs frequent daily service to Canberra from all state capitals. Unfortunately, no discount airlines run the Sydney Canberra route. However, discount airline **Virgin**




**ACCOMMODATIONS**
- The Brassey of Canberra **20**
- City Walk Hotel **8**
- Forest Inn Apartments **24**
- Kingston Court Apartments **21**
- University House **4**
- Victor Lodge **22**

**DINING**
- The Boat House by the Lake **17**
- Caffe Della Piazza **7**
- Little Saigon **6**
- The Palette Cafe **26**
- Portia's Place **23**
- Tosolini's **9**
- The Tryst **25**

**ATTRACTIONS**
- Australian Institute of Sport **3**
- Australian National Botanic Gardens **2**
- Australian War Memorial **11**
- Casino Canberra **10**
- High Court of Australia **15**
- National Capital Exhibition **12**
- National Library of Australia **13**
- National Gallery of Australia **16**
- National Museum of Australia **5**
- Old Parliment House **18**
- Parliament House **19**
- Questacon **14**
- Telstra Tower **1**

**Blue** (✆ **13 67 89** in Australia, or 07/3295 2296; www.virginblue.com.au) runs flights to and from Canberra from Adelaide, Brisbane, Broome, Cairns, Darwin, the Gold Coast, Hobart, and Hamilton Island. Check its website for great deals.

The Canberra Airport is about 10 minutes from the city center. It has car-rental desks, a currency exchange, a bar, a bistro, and a mailbox for cards and letters. The newsdealer sells stamps. The airport lacks lockers, showers, and a post office.

The **Airliner Bus** (✆ **02/6299 3722;** www.deanesbuslines.com.au) operates a 20-minute shuttle between the central business district and the airport Monday to Friday, leaving hourly. The one-way fare is A$7 (US$5.60), and it costs A$12 (US$9.60) round-trip.

**BY TRAIN** **Countrylink** (✆ **13 22 32** in Australia, or 02/6239 7039; www.countrylink.nsw.gov.au) runs three Canberra Xplorer trains daily between Sydney and Canberra. The 5-hour trip costs around A$70 (US$56) in first class and A$50 (US$40) in economy; children pay half-price, and a round-trip costs double. Many people book Countrylink transport-hotel packages (call **Countrylink Holidays,** ✆ **13 28 29** in Australia, or 02/8202 2000), which can save you quite a bit. Depending on the accommodations in Canberra, prices range from A$90 to A$190 (US$72–US$152) a night for a couple, and if you book in advance (the company recommends 2 weeks), you can save up to 40% on the fare through a Rail Escape package. Countrylink has an office at the Wynyard CityRail station in Sydney.

From Melbourne, the **Canberra Link,** run by **V/Line** (✆ **13 61 96** in Australia, or 03/9619 5000), involves a 5-hour bus trip and a 3½-hour train trip. It costs A$55 (US$44) for adults and A$34 (US$27) for students and children.

**Canberra Railway Station** (✆ **02/6239 6707**) is on Wentworth Avenue, Kingston, about 5km (3 miles) southeast of the city center. Coaches connect the railway station to the center.

**BY BUS** **Greyhound** (✆ **13 14 99** in Australia, or 07/4690 9950; www.greyhound.com.au) does six runs a day from Sydney to Canberra; the trip takes 4 to 4½ hours. Tickets cost around A$36 (US$29) for adults, A$33 (US$26) for students with an ISAC (International Student Activity Card), and A$29 (US$23) for children 3 to 14. Greyhound also makes three daily runs from Melbourne to Canberra. The trip takes 8 to 10 hours, and tickets cost A$60 (US$48) for adults, A$50 (US$40) for students, and A$45 (US$36) for children. Advance-purchase fares can be as much as 35% lower.

**Murrays Australia** (✆ **13 22 51** in Australia; www.murrays.com.au) runs from Sydney to Canberra three times a day for A$36 (US$29) for adults and A$20 (US$16) for children 3 to 14. Ask for YHA member discounts. Book over the Internet for further discounts.

Interstate buses arrive at **Jolimont Tourist Centre,** at the corner of Northbourne Avenue and Alinga Street, Canberra City.

**BY CAR** The ACT (Australian Capital Territory) is surrounded by New South Wales. Sydney is 306km (190 miles) northeast, and Melbourne is 651km (404 miles) southwest of Canberra. From Sydney, you can use an extension to the M5 motorway that links with the Eastern Distributor near Sydney Airport. Turn left before you reach the airport and follow signs to Wollongong, then the M5. The drive takes between 3 and 3½ hours. From Melbourne, take the Hume Highway to Yass and switch to the Barton Highway; the trip will take about 8 hours.

## VISITOR INFORMATION

The **Canberra Visitors Centre,** 330 Northbourne Ave., Dickson (✆ **1300/554 114** in Australia, or 02/6205 0044; www.visitcanberra.com.au), dispenses information and books accommodations. The office is open Monday through Friday from 9am to 5:30pm, and Saturday and Sunday from 9am to 4pm. The official government website (www.visitcanberra.com.au) is worth checking out.

**SPECIAL EVENTS** A host of free events—from concerts to competitions—is part of the annual **Canberra National Multicultural Festival** the first 3 weeks of March. The fun includes Canberra Day (a local public holiday, the third Mon in Mar), a hot-air balloon fiesta, fireworks displays, food and wine promotions, plenty of music, and a large range of other activities that draw on Australia's ethnic mix. Visitors may find it a little more difficult to book accommodations during this time, but you should always be able to find something. There are many other major events, including the flower show **Floriade,** the **Subaru Rally of Canberra,** the **Canberra 400 V8 Supercars** meeting, and the **National Folk Festival.** Check dates at www.visitcanberra.com.au.

## CITY LAYOUT

The first thing that strikes a visitor to Canberra is its parklike feel (amazing because there was barely a tree on the original site). Half a dozen avenues radiate from **Capital Hill,** where Parliament House stands. Each of these broad, tree-shaded streets leads to a traffic circle, from which more streets emanate. Around each hub, the streets form a pattern of concentric circles—not the easiest layout for visitors trying to find their way.

Another of Canberra's most notable features is **Lake Burley Griffin,** created by damming the Molonglo River. The centerpiece of the lake is the **Captain Cook Memorial Jet,** a spire of water that reaches 147m (482 ft.) into the air. Wedged between Commonwealth Avenue and Kings Avenue is the suburb of **Parkes,** also known as the National Triangle. Here you'll find many of the city's most impressive attractions, such as the National Gallery of Australia, the High Court of Australia, and Questacon—the National Science and Technology Centre. Many embassies and consulates are in the suburb of **Yarralumla,** east of Capital Hill; most of the other suburbs are filled with pleasant homes and small retail areas.

Canberra's main shopping district is on the other side of the lake, centered on Northbourne Avenue, one of the city's main thoroughfares. Officially Canberra City, this area is more commonly known as **"Civic."** Northeast of Civic is **Mount Ainslie,** with the Australian War Memorial at its foot; from its summit there are spectacular views of the city and beyond. Another good lookout point is the top of the **Telstra Tower** on Black Mountain, west of Civic and reached by Black Mountain Drive.

# 2 Getting Around

**BY CAR** **Advantage Car Rentals,** 74 Northbourne Ave. (corner of Barry Dr.; ✆ 1800/504 460 in Australia, or 02/6257 6888), has cars from A$35 (US$28) per day, including 200km (124 miles) per day. **Budget** (✆ 02/6257 1305), **Hertz** (✆ 02/6249 6211), **Thrifty** (✆ 1300/367 227 in Australia, or 02 6248 9081), **Avis** (✆ 02/6249 6088), and **Delta Europcar** (✆ 13 13 90 in Australia, or 02/6213 0300) have desks at the airport.

If you rent your own wheels, you might follow one or more of the six tourist drives marked with signs; pick up details from the Canberra Visitors Centre.

**BY TAXI** Canberra's only taxi company is **Canberra Cabs** (✆ **13 22 27** in Australia).

**BY BUS** **ACTION** (✆ **13 17 10** in Australia, or 02/6207 7611; www.action.act.gov.au) coordinates Canberra's bus system. The central bus terminal is on Alinga Street, in Civic. Single tickets cost A$2.40 (US$1.90) for adults and A$1.30 (US$1.05) for children 5 to 15. Weekly tickets cost A$24 (US$19), and 10-ride tickets cost A$21 (US$17) for adults and about half-price for children. Purchase all tickets on the bus or from most newsdealers and ACTION interchanges (transfer points).

For schedules, call ACTION Monday through Saturday from 7am to 9pm and Sunday from 8am to 6pm. Pick up bus route maps at bus interchanges, news agents, and the Canberra Visitors Centre.

Canberra Day Tours (✆ **02/6298 3344;** www.canberradaytours.com.au) offers a day tour by bus that includes a visit to Old Parliament House, the Australian War Memorial, Parliament House, the Embassy region, and Telstra Tower, and a cruise on Lake Burley Griffin. It costs A$69 (US$55) for adults and A$49 (US$39) for kids under 14.

**BY BICYCLE** Canberra is unique in Australia for its extensive system of cycle tracks—some 120km (74 miles) of them—which makes sightseeing on two wheels quite pleasurable. See "Outdoor Pursuits," later this chapter, for details on bike rental.

## *FAST FACTS:* Canberra

***American Express*** The office at **Centerpoint,** Shop 1, 185 City Walk (at the corner of Petrie Plaza), Civic (✆ **02/6247 2333**), is open Monday through Friday from 9am to 5pm and Saturday from 9am to noon.

***Business Hours*** Banks are generally open Monday through Thursday from 9:30am to 4pm and Friday from 9:30am to 5pm. Stores and offices are open Monday through Friday from 9am to 5:30pm. Many shops, particularly in the large malls, open on weekends and until 9pm Fridays.

***Climate*** The best time to visit Canberra is in spring (Sept–Nov) or autumn (Mar–May). Summers are hot and winters are cool and crisp.

***Currency Exchange*** Cash traveler's checks at banks; at **American Express** (above); or at **Thomas Cook,** at the Petrie Plaza entrance of the Canberra Centre (✆ **02/6257 2222**), open Monday through Friday from 9am to 5pm and Saturday from 9:30am to 12:30pm.

***Dentist*** Canberra lacks a dental emergency referral service. A reputable dentist is **Lachland B. Lewis,** Level 3, 40 Allara St., Civic (✆ **02/6257 2777,** or 02/6295 9495 for emergency calls only on weekends).

***Doctor*** The **Capital Medical Centre,** 2 Mort St., Civic (✆ **02/6257 3766**), is open Monday through Friday from 8:30am to 4:30pm. A standard consultation costs A$30 (US$24). The **Travellers' Medical & Vaccination Centre,** Level 5, 8–10 Hobart Place, Civic (✆ **02/6257 7154**), offers vaccinations and travel medicines. Standard consultations cost A$40 (US$32) and up.

***Embassies & Consulates*** The **British High Commission** (consular section) is on the 10th floor of the SAP Building, corner of Bunda and Akuna streets, Canberra City (✆ **02/6270 6666**); the **Canadian High Commission** is at Commonwealth

Avenue, Yarralumla (✆ **02/6270 4000**); the **U.S. Embassy** is at Moonah Place, Yarralumla (✆ **02/6214 5600**); and the **New Zealand High Commission** is at Commonwealth Avenue, Yarralumla (✆ **02/6270 4211**).

***Emergencies*** Call ✆ **000** for an ambulance, the police, or the fire department.

***Eyeglasses*** For repairs, glasses, and contact lenses, try **OPSM Express,** Shop 5, Lower Ground Floor, Canberra Centre, Civic (✆ **02/6249 7344**). It's open Monday through Thursday 9am to 5:30pm, Friday 9am to 9pm, and Saturday 9am to 4pm.

***Hospitals*** For medical attention, go to the **Canberra Hospital,** Yamba Drive, Garran (✆ **02/6244 2222**), or call the **Accident & Emergency Department** (✆ **02/6244 2324**).

***Hot Lines*** **Rape Crisis Centre** (✆ 02/6247 2525); **Drug/Alcohol Crisis Line** (✆ 02/6205 4545, 24 hr.); **Lifeline Crisis Councelling** (✆ 13 11 14 in Australia); **Salvation Army Councelling Service** (✆ 02/9331 6000); **Poison Information Centre** (✆ 02/6285 2852); **National Roads & Motorists Association** (✆ 13 21 32 in Australia).

***Internet Access*** The **National Library of Australia,** Parkes Place, Parkes (✆ **02/6262 1111**), has e-mail facilities available Monday through Thursday 9am to 5pm. Internet access is readily available around town at libraries and in Internet cafes. The Canberra Visitors Centre can provide you with a full list.

***Pharmacies (Chemist Shops)*** The **Canberra Centre Pharmacy,** Civic (✆ **02/6249 8074**), is open during general shopping hours. A number of after-hours pharmacies are listed in the Canberra Yellow Pages.

***Photographic Needs*** **Fletchers Fotographics,** Shop 2, 38 Akuna St., Civic (✆ **02/6247 8460**), is the best place to buy camera gear and film. It also repairs cameras and sells secondhand equipment.

***Post Office*** The **Canberra GPO,** 53–73 Alinga St., Civic (✆ **02/6209 1680**), is open Monday through Friday from 8:30am to 5:30pm. The general delivery (poste restante) address is c/o Canberra GPO, ACT 2601.

***Restrooms*** Found near the city bus exchange, City Hall, and London Circuit.

## 3 Accommodations You Can Afford

Canberra has a good scattering of places to stay, and generally accommodations are much cheaper than in most other state capitals. Many people travel to Canberra during the week, so many hotels offer cheaper weekend rates. You should always ask about special deals. The rates given below are rack rates, or what the hotels hope they'll get on a good day—you can often get a room for less. The Canberra Visitors Centre (see "Visitor Information," above) can provide information about accommodations options.

Budget travelers might want to stay at the **Canberra YHA** (191 Dryandra St., O'Connor, ACT 2602; ✆ **02/6248 9155;** fax 02/6249 1731; www.yha.com.au). It's set out in the bush with great views down on the city, and there's a free shuttle bus. A bed in a dorm room costs A$23 (US$18); the six twin or double rooms cost A$58 (US$46) each.

**The Brassey of Canberra** ★ Rooms in this 1927 heritage-listed building, formerly a boardinghouse for visiting government officials, are large, quiet, and somewhat plush.

The garden bar and piano lounge are popular. Other good points include its proximity to Parliament House and other major attractions, and the hearty breakfasts.

Belmore Gardens, Barton, ACT 2600. ✆ **1800/659 191** in Australia, or 02/6273 3766. Fax 02/6273 2791. www.brassey.net.au. 81 units. A$132 (US$106) double; A$165 (US$132) family room; A$141 (US$113) heritage double; A$187 (US$150) heritage family room. Rates include full breakfast. Check for specials. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. Bus: 36 to National Press Club. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; coin-op laundry; dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

**City Walk Hotel** You can hardly get closer to the city center than at this former YWCA turned budget hotel. Being right near the Jolimont Tourist Centre bus interchange, it picks up a lot of business from backpackers and budget travelers arriving by bus. The rooms are pretty basic but clean. The hostel was completely refurbished in 2003. It has five double rooms with shared bathrooms, three of which have two extra single beds. One room (no. 204) has air-conditioning. Family rooms sleep up to 10 people, all in one room. The communal facilities include a kitchen, telephone, tea- and coffeemakers, and a lounge area with TV and VCR.

2 Mort St., Civic, ACT 2601. ✆ **1800/600 124** in Australia, or 02/6257 0124. Fax 02/6257 0116. www.citywalkhotel.com.au. 55 units, 18 with bathroom (shower only). A$65 (US$52) double without bathroom; A$90 (US$72) double with bathroom; A$105 (US$84) family room (2 adults, 2 children); A$30–A$32 (US$24–US$26) dorm bed. Extra person A$20 (US$16). MC, V. Parking on the street. **Amenities:** Coin-op laundry. *In room:* A/C (in 1), TV, fridge, coffeemaker, no phone.

**Forrest Inn and Apartments** The Forrest Inn is far from fancy, but it's close to shops, restaurants, and Parliament House. The outside of this 1960s property looks tacky, but the interior has been refurbished. The motel-style rooms are small and colorless; the apartments are nicer and have full-size kitchens, so I recommend that you spend a little more money and go for these. Two-bedroom apartments are perfect for families, and even the one-bedroom apartments have a single bed in the living room.

30 National Circuit, Forrest, ACT 2603. ✆ **1800/676 372** in Australia, or 02/6295 3433. Fax 02/6295 2119. www.forrestinn.com.au. 102 units. A$110 (US$88) motel room; A$150 (US$120) 1-bedroom apt; A$175 (US$140) 2-bedroom apt. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. Bus: 39 to Rydges Canberra Hotel. **Amenities:** Restaurant; limited room service (in motel); coin-op laundry. *In room:* A/C, TV, kitchen (in apts), minibar, hair dryer, iron.

**Kingston Court Apartments** ★ About 1km (½ mile) from the Parliamentary Triangle and 6km (3¾ miles) from Civic, this apartment complex is a good option if you're looking for the comforts of home. The apartments are modern and spacious and come with a kitchen, washer and dryer, and a balcony or courtyard.

4 Tench St., Kingston, ACT 2604. ✆ **1800/655 754** in Australia, or 02/6295 2244. Fax 02/6295 5300. www.kingstonterrace.com.au. 36 units. A$160 (US$128) double apt. Extra adult A$20 (US$16), extra child A$10 (US$8). AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. Bus: 38. **Amenities:** Small outdoor heated pool; half-size tennis court. *In room:* A/C, TV/VCR, dataport, kitchen, minibar, fridge, hair dryer, iron.

**University House** ★ University House, less than 2km (1¼ miles) from the city center, offers a pleasant alternative to run-of-the-mill hotels in a similar price bracket. Large twin rooms come with two single beds; suites have a sitting room and a queen-size bed; one-bedroom apartments have a bedroom with a queen-size bed, a sitting room, and a kitchenette; and two-bedroom apartments are huge, with two large bedrooms, a dining room, a lounge, and a full kitchen. All units have bathrooms with showers and tubs.

Australian National University, Balmain Crescent, Acton (G.P.O. Box 1535, Canberra, ACT 2601). ✆ **1800/814 864** in Australia, or 02/6249 5211. Fax 02/6249 5252. www.anu.edu.au/unihouse. 104 units. A$124 (US$99) twin;

A$126–A$149 (US$101–US$119) suite; A$136 (US$109) 1-bedroom apt; A$190 (US$152) 2-bedroom apt. Ask about packages, especially during low season. AE, DC, MC, V. Free secured parking. Bus: 34. **Amenities:** Restaurant; cafe; tennis court; access to nearby health club; bike rentals; car-rental desk; babysitting; coin-op laundry; laundry service; dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* TV, kitchenette (in 1-bedroom apts), kitchen (in 2-bedroom apts), fridge, hair dryer.

**Victor Lodge** *Value* Backpackers, parliamentary staff, and budget travelers frequent this friendly place, situated right next to Kingston's shops and about a 15-minute drive from the city center. Rooms vary, from dorms with three, four, or five beds to modern, simple doubles. Each has a washbasin. There are communal showers and toilets, and a courtyard. The staff picks up guests from the train and bus stations daily and drops off guests in town every morning. It's a nice place overall, but you'll have to decide whether you want to put up with the short trek into the city.

The owners also own the reasonable **Best Western** motel next door at 27 Dawes St. (✆ **02/6295 2111;** http://motelmonaro.bestwestern.com.au). It charges A$95 (US$76) for a double. Apparently, long-suffering parents often dump their teenage kids at the lodge and live it up at the motel.

29 Dawes St., Kingston, ACT 2604. ✆ **02/6295 7777.** Fax 02/6295 2466. www.victorlodge.com.au. 29 units, none with bathroom. A$59 (US$47) double; A$23 (US$18) dorm bed. Rates include continental breakfast. MC, V. Free parking. Bus: 38, 39, or 50. **Amenities:** Bike rental; tour desk; coin-op laundry; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, iron.

## 4 Where to Dine

**All Bar Nun** PUB FARE/PIZZA This popular bar features big-screen sports, outdoor tables, and a good range of beers. On the menu are plenty of light dishes like falafel, fish burgers, steak sandwiches, salads, and pizzas as well as a few mains, such as garlic and chile prawns with rice, white wine, and cream sauce; sausages and mashed potatoes with an onion gravy; and fish tempura with french fries

O'Connor Shops, Macpherson Street, O'Connor. ✆ **02/6257 9191.** Main courses A$13–A$14 (US$10–US$11). AE, MC, V. Daily noon–3pm and 6–10:30pm.

**Caffe Della Piazza** ★ ITALIAN/CAFE Good eating isn't hard to find in Canberra, and this place is up there with the best. It has won several awards for its Italian-inspired cooking, including the catering industries' award for the best restaurant in the state. The restaurant offers both indoor and outdoor dining in pleasant surroundings and is a good place to pop in for a light meal and a coffee or for something more substantial. Pastas cost around A$11 (US$8.80), and the best seller is chicken breast strips in *machiato* sauce. You need to reserve early for Friday or Saturday evening.

19 Garema Place, Civic. ✆ **02/6248 9711.** Reservations recommended. Main courses A$6.50–A$18 (US$5.20–US$14). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 10:30am–midnight.

**Little Saigon** *Value* VIETNAMESE This spacious restaurant has minimalist decor and floor-to-ceiling windows offering views of the city center. Tables are on either side of an indoor pond, and there's a bar in the back of the restaurant. The menu is vast, with lots of noodle dishes as well as spicy seafood, duck, chicken, pork, beef, and lamb. The top seller is lemon-grass and chile chicken. There's a "lunch box deal" when any item on the menu, plus rice, costs A$5 (US$4).

Alinga St. and Northbourne Ave., Civic. ✆ **02/6230 5003.** Main courses A$12–A$15 (US$9.60–US$12). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 10am–3pm and 5–10:30pm.

**The Palette Café** ★ CAFE/MODERN AUSTRALIAN This is a great choice for lunch, especially because it's in the same building as Canberra's largest private art

gallery. You can eat inside, surrounded by artwork, or claim a table outside in the sunny courtyard. Standout dishes include grilled asparagus spears with Japanese scallops and almond hollandaise, and chile-salted baby octopus. Caesar salads are particularly good, as are mushrooms with a sauce of soy, Japanese rice wine, honey, and coriander. The etchings, paintings, and sculptures on display are of high quality and are well priced.

Beaver Gallery, 81 Denison St., Deakin. ✆ **02/6282 8416.** Main courses A$14–A$22 (US$11–US$18). AE, MC, V. Daily 10am–5pm.

**Portia's Place** CANTONESE/MALAYSIAN/PEKING A small restaurant serving excellent traditional cookery, Portia's Place often fills up early and does a roaring lunchtime trade. The best things on the menu are the crispy fried duck rolled in paper-thin Chinese pancakes with hoisin sauce, the wonderful steamed dumplings, and the Shantung chicken with a soy, vinegar, and chile sauce.

11 Kennedy St., Kingston. ✆ **02/6239 7970.** Main courses A$9.80–A$19 (US$7.85–US$15). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily noon–2:30pm; Sun–Wed 5–10pm; Thurs–Sat 5–10:30pm.

**The Tryst** ★★ *Finds* MODERN AUSTRALIAN The personal touches and service shine here, and the food is consistently delicious. The restaurant is tastefully decorated in upscale cafe style, with the kitchen staff on show as they rustle up some of the capital's best tucker. It's relaxed, feeling more communal than intimate on busy nights. My favorite dish is Atlantic salmon served with beurre blanc sauce and potatoes; other popular choices include eye filet steak and pumpkin risotto. If you have room left for dessert, don't miss out on sticky date pudding served with hot butterscotch sauce, pralines, and ice cream—it's as good as it sounds. The long list of daily specials that complement the extensive menu could keep you busy for weeks.

Bougainville St., Manuka. ✆ **02/6239 4422.** Reservations recommended. Main courses A$15–A$23 (US$12–US$18). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily noon–2:30pm; Mon–Sat 6–10pm.

### WORTH A SPLURGE

**The Boat House by the Lake** ★★ MODERN AUSTRALIAN On the shores of Lake Burley Griffin, The Boat House is a pleasant dining retreat with uninterrupted water views. The large dining room's floor-to-ceiling windows capture the view, and the outside terrace is nice for a pre- or post-dinner retreat. To start, try Coffin Bay oysters, either natural with lemon or topped with litchi, avocado, and chile salsa. Main courses are delicious and wordy: for example, the seared reef fish, with a sweet corn puree, warm snake bean, and mushroom salad, with sea urchin hollandaise and turmeric oil. The wine list features local vintages.

Grevillea Park, Menindee Dr., Barton. ✆ **02/6273 5500.** Reservations required. Main courses A$27–A$36 (US$22–US$29). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Fri noon–3pm; Mon–Sat 6–10:30pm.

## 5 Seeing the Sights

**Australian Institute of Sport** This institution provides first-class training and facilities for Australia's elite athletes. Tours, led by one of the institute's athletes, include visits to the gymnasium, basketball courts, and Olympic swimming pool to see training in progress. There is also a fascinating interactive display where visitors can test their sporting skills.

Leverrier Crescent, Bruce. ✆ **02/6214 1444.** Admission A$12 (US$9.60) adults, A$6 (US$4.80) children, A$33 (US$26) families. Tours leave the AIS shop Mon–Fri 11:30am and 2:30pm; Sat–Sun 10, 10:20, 11:30am, 1, and 2:30pm. Bus: 80 from city center.

*Moments* **Up, Up & Away**

**Balloon Aloft** (✆ **02/4938 1955;** www.balloonaloft.com.au) offers fabulous 45-minute sunrise flights over Canberra Monday through Friday for A$210 (US$168) for adults and A$140 (US$112) for children 6 to 12, including a champagne breakfast on touchdown. On weekends a 1-hour trip costs A$250 (US$200) for adults and A$160 (US$128) for children; breakfast costs A$25 (US$20) for adults and A$10 (US$8) for kids.

**Dawn Drifters** (✆ **02/6285 4450;** fax 02/6281 5315; www.dawndrifters.com.au) will also send you soaring. One-hour champagne flights are A$195 (US$156) for adults Monday through Friday, A$230 (US$184) on weekends and holidays. Children 6 to 12 go for 40% of the adult price; kids 3 to 5 accompanied by an adult ride free. Breakfast is A$20 (US$16) extra.

**Australian War Memorial** ★★ This monument to Australian troops who gave their lives for their country is truly moving and well worth a visit. Artifacts and displays tell the story of Australia's conflicts abroad. You won't soon forget the exhibition on Gallipoli, the bloody World War I battle in which so many Anzac (Australian and New Zealand Army Corps) servicemen were slaughtered. The Hall of Memory is the focus of the memorial, where the body of the Unknown Soldier lies entombed. (His remains were brought back from a World War I battlefield in 1993.) The Memorial also holds one of the largest collections of Australian art in the world, including works by Tom Roberts, Arthur Streeton, and Grace Cossington-Smith. Recently added exhibits include a film showing the surrender of Singapore, projected onto the actual table on which the surrender was signed, and a simulated ride aboard an original Lancaster bomber. Anzac Hall and Bradbury Aircraft Hall house significant aircraft and large pieces of war memorabilia.

At the head of Anzac Parade on Limestone Ave. ✆ **02/6243 4211.** Free admission. Daily 10am–5pm (when the Last Post is played). Guided tours at 10, 10:30, 11am, 1:30, and 2pm. Closed Dec 25. Bus: 33 or 40.

**Canberra Deep Space Communication Complex** ★ This information center, which stands beside huge tracking dishes, is a must for anyone interested in space. There are plenty of models, audiovisual recordings, and displays, including a space suit, space food, and archival film footage of the Apollo moon landings. The complex is still active, tracking and recording results from the Mars Pathfinder, *Voyager 1* and *2,* and the Cassini, Soho, Galileo, and Ulysses space exploration projects, as well as providing a link with NASA spacecraft. This is a great stop on the way back from the Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve (p. 608). There's no public bus service, but several tour companies offer programs that include the complex.

Tidbinbilla, 39km (24 miles) southwest of Civic. ✆ **02/6201 7880.** www.cdscc.nasa.gov. Free admission. Summer daily 9am–8pm; rest of year daily 9am–5pm.

**High Court of Australia** The High Court, an impressive concrete-and-glass building that overlooks Lake Burley Griffin and stands next to the National Gallery of Australia, was opened by Elizabeth II in 1980. It is home to the highest court in Australia's judicial system and contains three courtrooms, a video display, and a huge seven-story-high

public hall. When the court is in session, visitors can observe the proceedings from the public gallery. Check ahead for session details.

Overlooking Lake Burley Griffin, Parkes Place. ✆ **02/6270 6811.** www.hcourt.gov.au. Free admission. Mon–Fri 9:45am–4:30pm. Closed public holidays. Bus: 34.

**National Capital Exhibition** If you want to find out more about Canberra's beginnings—and get a memorable view of Lake Burley Griffin, the Captain Cook Memorial Water Jet, and the Carillon in the bargain—then head here. The displays are well done, and a film provides an overview of the city's design.

On the lakeshore at Regatta Point in Commonwealth Park. ✆ **02/6257 1068.** Free admission. Daily 9am–6pm (until 5pm in winter).

**National Gallery of Australia** Linked to the High Court by a pedestrian bridge, the National Gallery showcases both Australian and international art. The permanent collection and traveling exhibitions are on display in 11 separate galleries. You'll find paintings by big names such as Claude Monet and Jackson Pollock, and Australian painters Arthur Boyd, Sidney Nolan, Arthur Streeton, Charles Condor, Tom Roberts, and Albert Tucker. The exhibition of Tiwi Islander burial poles in the foyer is also interesting (the Tiwi Islands include Melville and Bathurst islands off Darwin), and there's a large collection of Aboriginal bark paintings from central Australia. Free guided tours start daily at 11am and 2pm. On Sunday and Thursday at 11am, a free tour focuses on Aboriginal art. A sculpture garden surrounding the gallery has 24 sculptures and is always open to the public.

Parkes Place. ✆ **02/6240 6502.** www.nga.gov.au. Free admission (except for major touring exhibitions). Daily 10am–5pm. Closed Dec 25. Bus: 36 or 39 from Old Parliament House, or 34 from Parkes Place in front of the High Court.

**National Museum of Australia** The first official all-encompassing museum dedicated to the nation of Australia opened in 2001 to rave reviews. Using state-of-the-art technology and hands-on exhibits, the museum concentrates on three main themes: Australian society and its history since 1788, the interaction of people with the Australian environment, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and

### *Tips* Recommended Tours

If you want to cruise Lake Burley Griffin, then team up with **Lake Cruises** (✆ **0419/418 846** mobile; www.lakecruises.com.au). Cruises take place only on weekends on a replica of an Edwardian launch, licensed to carry 10 passengers. One-hour cruises cost A$10 (US$8) for adults and A$5 (US$4) for kids 10 to 17. Kids under 10 travel free. Book ahead.

If you like ghosts and the paranormal, then head out across the city with Australia's resident cryptonaturalist, Tim the Yowie Man (he officially changed his name to this). The **Weird Canberra Ghost and History Tour** takes place on the last Friday and Saturday of the month (except Dec). Tours are 1½ hours long and leave from outside the Griffin Centre (opposite Gus' Café on Bunda Street, Civic) at 7, 9, and 11pm. They cost A$49 (US$39) per person (children might get a bit scared). Call ✆ **0414/232 244** (mobile) for details or check out www.paranormalaustralia.com.

histories. It relies more on images and sound than on historic objects to tell the stories of Australia. Allow a couple of hours if it grabs you and 30 minutes to rush around baffled if it doesn't.

Acton Peninsula (about 5km/3 miles from the city center). ✆ **1800/026 132** in Australia, or 02/6208 5000. www.nma.gov.au. Free admission (fees for special exhibitions). Daily 9am–5pm.

**Old Parliament House** The seat of government from 1927 to 1988, the Old Parliament House is now home to exhibitions from the National Museum and the Australian Archives. The National Portrait Gallery is also here, and outside on the lawn is the Aboriginal Tent Embassy, which was set up in 1972 in a bid to persuade the authorities to recognize the land ownership claims of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The red, black, and yellow Aboriginal flag first came to prominence here. Interestingly, the Australian Heritage Commission now recognizes the campsite as a place of special cultural significance.

On King George Terrace, midway between the new Parliament House (see below) and the lake. ✆ **02/6270 8222.** www.oldparliamenthouse.gov.au. Admission A$2 (US$1.60) adults, A$1 (US80¢) children, A$5 (US$4) families. Daily 9am–5pm. Bus: 39.

**Parliament House** Conceived by American architect Walter Burley Griffin in 1912, but not built until 1988, Canberra's focal point was designed to blend organically into its setting at the top of Capital Hill; only a national flag supported by a giant four-footed flagpole rises above the peak of the hill. In good weather, picnickers crowd the grass that covers the roof, where the view is spectacular. Inside are more than 3,000 works of Australian arts and crafts, and extensive areas of the building are open to the general public. Just inside the main entrance, look for a mosaic by Michael Tjakamarra Nelson, *Meeting Place,* which represents a gathering of Aboriginal tribes. There's also a 20m-long (66-ft.) tapestry by Arthur Boyd in the Great Hall on the first floor and one of the four known versions of the Magna Carta in the Great Hall beneath the flagpole. Free 50-minute guided tours run throughout the day.

Parliament is usually in session Monday through Thursday between mid-February and late June and from mid-August to mid-December. Both the Lower House—the House of Representatives (where the prime minister sits)—and the Upper House (the Senate) have public viewing galleries. The best time to see the action is during Question Time, which starts at 2pm in the Lower House. If you turn up early, you might get a seat; otherwise, make reservations for gallery tickets through the **sergeant-at-arms** (✆ **02/6277 4889**) at least a day in advance. Free 45-minute tours of the building start every 30 minutes beginning at 9am.

Capital Hill. ✆ **02/6277 5399.** Free admission. Daily 9am–5pm. Closed Dec 25. Bus: 39.

**Questacon—The National Science and Technology Centre** *Kids* Questacon offers some 200 hands-on exhibits that can keep you and your inner child occupied for hours. Exhibits cluster in six galleries, each representing a different aspect of science. The artificial earthquake is a big attraction. The center is great for kids, but give it a miss if you've already visited the Powerhouse Museum (p. 146) in Sydney.

King Edward Terrace, Parkes. ✆ **02/6270 2800.** Admission A$10 (US$8) adults, A$6.50 (US$5.20) students, A$5 (US$4) children, A$28 (US$22) families. Daily 10am–5pm. Closed Dec 25. Bus: 34.

**Telstra Tower** The tower, which rises 195m (640 ft.) above the summit of Black Mountain, has both open-air and enclosed viewing galleries that provide magnificent 360-degree views over Canberra and the surrounding countryside. Those who dine in

the pricey, revolving **Tower Restaurant** (✆ **02/6248 7096**) receive a refund of their admission charge. There's no bus service to the tower.

Black Mountain Dr. ✆ **02/6248 1911.** Admission A$3.30 (US$2.65) adults, A$1.10 (US90¢) children. Daily 9am–10pm.

**Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve** *Moments* A bushfire in 2003 destroyed much of this once-glorious nature reserve and killed all but one of its resident koalas. Things recover quickly in Australia, though, and many of the animals are back. Expect to see kangaroos and wallabies in their natural environment. In the new wetlands section, visitors "walk on water" on elevated boardwalks and viewing platforms, which afford looks at pelicans, blue-billed ducks, and other waterfowl. Bushbird feeding time is 2:30pm daily. For the more adventurous, trails run to the mountaintops. Unlike some other wildlife parks, this one has plenty of space, so sometimes you'll have to look hard to spot the animals. A printed guide is available from the visitor center. Call the visitor center for information on free, ever-changing weekend talks and walks.

There's no public bus service, but several tour companies offer programs that include the reserve. **Go Bush Tours** (✆ **02/6231 3023;** www.gobushtours.com.au) runs tours to the reserve as well as the neighboring Canberra Deep Space Communication Complex for A$66 (US$53) per person, including morning tea and lunch.

Tidbinbilla. Paddys River Rd., RMB 141 via Tharwa. ✆ **02/6205 1233.** Fax 02/6205 1232. www.environment.act.gov.au. Admission A$9 (US$7.20) per vehicle. Daily 9am–6pm (8pm in summer). Visitor center Mon–Fri 9am–4:30pm; Sat–Sun 9am–5:30pm. Take Tourist Rte. 5 (following large brown signs with orange number) from central Canberra.

## BOTANIC GARDENS & A NEARBY NATIONAL PARK

The **Australian National Botanic Gardens** ★, Clunies Ross Street, Black Mountain, Acton (✆ **02/6250 9540**), is home to the best collection of Australian native plants anywhere. The gardens, on 51 hectares (126 acres) on the lower slopes of Black Mountain, feature a Eucalyptus Lawn containing more than 600 species of eucalyptus, a rainforest area, a Tasmanian alpine garden, and self-guided walking trails. Free guided tours depart from the visitor center at 11am on weekdays, and 11am and 2pm on weekends. The garden is open daily from 9am to 5pm (to 8pm in summer). The visitor center is open daily from 9:30am to 4:30pm. There's no bus service to the gardens.

The **Namadgi National Park** ★ covers almost half of the Australian Capital Territory. Parts of the park, which has rolling plateaus, good trout-fishing streams, and dense forest, are just 30km (19 miles) from Canberra. Marked hiking trails run throughout the park. Spring is the best time to visit for the prolific display of bush flowers. In the past, sections of the park were cleared for sheep grazing, but these days the pastures are popular with hundreds of gray kangaroos. (They're easiest to spot in the early morning and late afternoon.) At Yankee Hat, off the Nass/Boboyan Road, is an Aboriginal rock-art site. The **Namadgi Visitors Centre** (✆ **02/6207 2900**), on the Nass/Boboyan Road, 3km (1¾ miles) south of the township of Tharwa, has maps and information on walking trails. The January 2003 fires burned much of the park, but the forests regenerate rapidly, and the animals are back in abundance.

## 6 Outdoor Pursuits

**BIKING** With 120km (74 miles) of bike paths, Canberra is made for exploring on two wheels. Rent a bike from **Mr. Spoke's Bike Hire,** Barrine Drive, near the ferry terminal, Acton (✆ **02/6257 1188**). Bikes for adults cost A$12 (US$9.60) for an hour, A$20 (US$16) for a half-day, and A$30 (US$24) for a full day.

**BOATING** **Burley Griffin Boat Hire,** Barrine Drive, near the ferry terminal, Acton (✆ **02/6249 6861**), rents paddle boats for A$20 (US$16) per hour and canoes for A$14 (US$11) per hour. It's open daily. **Row 'n' Ride,** near the MacDermott Place Boat Ramp, Belconnen (✆ **02/6254 7838**), is open on weekends and school and public holidays and offers canoes from A$9 (US$7.20) per hour, kayaks for A$10 (US$8) per hour, and mountain bikes for A$9 (US$7.20) per hour.

**GLIDING** **The Canberra Gliding Club** (✆ **02/6257 1494** or 02/6452 3994) offers joy flights and trial instructional flights on weekends and public holidays from the Bunyan Airfield. Flights cost A$60 (US$48).

**SWIMMING** The indoor heated pool at the **Australian Institute of Sport** (✆ **02/6214 1281**), Leverrier Crescent, Bruce, a short drive northwest of Civic, is open to the public at certain times during the day (call ahead to check schedules). Adults pay A$4 (US$3.20) to swim, and children pay A$2 (US$1.60). You must wear swimming caps, which you can buy there for A$2.50 (US$2). It costs A$6 (US$4.80) to use the pool, Jacuzzi, and sauna.

**TENNIS** The **National Tennis and Squash Centre,** Federal Highway, Lyneham (✆ **02/6247 0929**), has squash courts for A$12 to A$16 (US$9.60–US$13) per hour, depending on when you want to play. Tennis courts can be booked for A$9.50 to A$15 (US$7.60–US$12). The Australian Institute of Sport (p. 604) also rents courts.

## 7 Canberra After Dark

The **"Times Out"** section in Thursday's *Canberra Times* has entertainment listings. The Canberra Citysearch website (www.canberra.citysearch.com.au) lists and reviews bars and nightclubs and gives information on gigs.

Of the pubs in town, the best in the city center are the British-style **Wig & Pen,** on the corner of Limestone and Alinga streets (✆ **02/6248 0171**); the popular **Moosehead's Pub,** 105 London Circuit, in the south of the city (✆ **02/6257 6496**); the **Phoenix,** 21 East Row (✆ **02/6247 1606**), which has live music upstairs (cover charge); and **P. J. O'Reileys** (✆ **02/6230 4752**), on the corner of West Row and Alinga Street, an authentic-style Irish pub. **King O'Malleys** (✆ **02/6257 0111**), Mort Street, is another popular Irish pub in the city.

A good nightclub for the young at heart is the American-style **Bobby McGee's Entertainment Lounge** in the Rydges Canberra Hotel, London Circuit (✆ **02/6257 7999**). It's open Monday, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday nights. Admission runs A$5 to A$10 (US$4–US$8).

If you're looking to roll some dice, the **Casino Canberra,** in Glebe Park, 21 Binara St., Civic (✆ **1800/806 833** in Australia, or 02/6257 7074), is a small, older-style casino offering the usual games daily from noon to 6am. Dress regulations prohibit leisurewear, running shoes, and denim, but overall it's a casual place to lose some money.

# 15

# Tasmania

*by Marc Llewellyn*

The name "Tasmania" suggests an unspoiled place, with vast stretches of wilderness roamed by strange creatures like the Tasmanian devil. Many mainland residents still half-jokingly refer to their "country cousins" on the island as rednecks. In truth, most Tasmanians are hospitable and friendly people, lacking the harsh edge that big cities can foster. Some also care passionately for the environment, while others are involved in cutting down its ancient forests, which are mostly turned into woodchips to be sent off to Japan to be made into paper. Many Australians look upon this as a national disgrace.

Visitors to Tasmania are surprised by its size, though compared with the scale of the rest of Australia, the distances are certainly more manageable. Dense rainforests, mountain peaks, alpine meadows, great lakes, eucalyptus stands, and fertile farmland are all easily accessible, but you should be prepared for several hours of concentrated driving between the main attractions. Among Tasmania's chief attractions is its natural environment. More than 20% of the island has been declared a World Heritage area, and nearly a third of the island is protected in 14 national parks.

Tasmania's other main draw is its history. Remains of the Aboriginal people who lived here for thousands of years are evident in rock paintings, engravings, stories, and the aura of spirituality that still holds in places where modern civilization has not yet reached.

Europeans discovered Tasmania (or Van Diemen's Land, as it was once known) in 1642, when the seafarer Abel Tasman set anchor off its southwest coast. It wasn't identified as an island until 1798. Tasmania made its mark as a dumping ground for convicts, who were more often than not transported for petty crimes in their homeland. The brutal system of control, still evident in the ruins at Port Arthur and elsewhere, spilled over into persecution of the native population. The last full-blooded Tasmanian Aborigine died in 1876, 15 years after the last convict transportation. Most had already died of disease and maltreatment at the hands of the settlers.

## 1 Exploring Tasmania

**VISITOR INFORMATION** Tourism Tasmania (✆ **1300/655 145** in Australia; www.discovertasmania.com.au) operates **Tasmanian Travel Centres** in more than 30 towns throughout the state. It can arrange travel passes, ferry and bus tickets, car rentals, cruises, and accommodations. Pick up a copy of *Travelways,* Tourism Tasmania's tourist tabloid, for details on transportation, accommodations, restaurants, and attractions around Tasmania.

A good independent website to look at is www.discover-tasmania.com.au (different to the site listed in the paragraph above).

Bonorong Park Wildlife Centre **3**
Cataract Gorge **1**
Freycinet National Park **2**
Royal Tasmanian Botanical Gardens **4**
Tasmanian Devil Park Wildlife Rescue Centre **5**

**WHEN TO GO** The best time to visit Tasmania is between October and April, when the weather is at its best. By May, nights are getting cold, days are getting shorter, and the deciduous trees are starting to turn golden. Winters (June–Aug), especially in the high country, can be quite harsh—though that's the best time to curl up in front of a blazing fire. The east coast is generally milder than the west coast, which is buffeted by the "Roaring 40s"—the winds that blow across the ocean and the 40° meridian, from as far away as Argentina.

The busy season for tourism runs December through February, as well as during public and school holiday periods. Unlike the rest of Australia, Tasmanian schools have three terms. Term dates are from the second week in February to the last week in May; the third week in June to the first week in September; and the fourth week in September to the first week in December.

**GETTING THERE** The quickest way to get to Tasmania is by air. **Qantas** (✆ **13 13 13** in Australia, or 800/227-4500 in the U.S. and Canada; www.qantas.com) flies from the mainland to Hobart and Launceston. **Virgin Blue** (✆ **13 67 89** in Australia, or 07/3295 2296; www.virginblue.com.au) offers discounted trips from Melbourne to Hobart and Launceston, with connections from other capitals, if you book early from the website. **Jetstar,** a Qantas offshoot (✆ **13 15 38** in Australia, or 03/8341 4901; www.jetstar.com.au), also flies to Hobart and Launceston. Round-trip fares cost from around A$100 (US$80) if booked on the Net. **Regional Express** (✆ **13 17 13** in Australia, or 02/6393 5550; www.regionalexpress.com.au) flies from Melbourne to Devonport and Burnie in the state's north.

Two high-speed ferry services connect Melbourne and Tasmania. The *Spirit of Tasmania I* and *II* can each carry 1,400 passengers as well as cars. They make the crossing from Melbourne's Station Pier to Tasmania's Devonport (on the north coast) in around 10 hours. The ferries leave both Melbourne and Devonport at 9pm and arrive at around 7am. From roughly December 20 to April 27, there's also day service on weekends, leaving both ports at 9am and arriving at 7pm. Prices are based on "shoulder" and "peak" times: The shoulder seasons run from roughly August 31 to December 6, and from January 27 to April 27. A one-way seat costs A$81 to A$183 (US$65–US$146) for adults depending on season, and A$82 to A$101 (US$66–US$81) for children 3 to 16. Three- to four-berth cabins cost from A$112 to A$244 (US$90–US$195) for adults and A$97 to A$185 (US$78–US$148) for kids depending on the season and if you have a porthole. Twin cabins cost A$126 to A$273 (US$101–US$218) for adults and A$107 to A$205 (US$86–US$164) for children. Deluxe cabins cost A$295 to A$387 (US$236–US$310) for adults and A$177 to A$383 (US$142–US$306) for kids. Transporting a standard-size car costs A$55 (US$44) from December 6 to January 25, free the rest of the year.

In early 2004, the *Spirit of Tasmania III* commenced sailing between Sydney and Devonport. At press time, the vessel was experiencing increased competition from airlines and was discounting heavily. However, by the time you read this it might be scrapped, so definitely check when you are planning your trip. The 650-passenger car ferry departs Sydney at 3pm on Tuesday, Friday, and Sunday, and Devonport at 3pm on Monday, Thursday, and Saturday. There are only two sailings per week in winter (roughly June–Aug). The trip takes 20 hours. One-way fares start at A$160 (US$128) for passage in a hostel-type dorm; A$230 (US$184) per adult in a 3- to 4-berth cabin; and A$270 (US$216) per adult in a double cabin. Cars travel free. Prices vary with the seasons and may be adjusted, so check the website.

### Value National Park Admission Fees

A **Tassie Holiday Pass** costs A$33 (US$26) and allows admission for a car and passengers to Tasmania's national parks for 2 months. Pedestrians, cyclists, motorcyclists, and coach passengers pay A$14 (US$11) for 2 months. Occasional users can buy a 24-hour pass for A$10 (US$8) per car; walkers, cyclists, motorcyclists, and coach passengers pay A$3.50 (US$2.80) per day. Passes are available at all major parks and Tasmanian Visitor Information Centres. For more information on the island's national parks, contact the **Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service** (✆ **03/6233 8203;** www.parks.tas.gov.au).

Make reservations for any of the ferries through **TT-Line** (✆ **1800/634 906** in Australia, or 03/9206 6211; www.spiritoftasmania.com.au). Special offers are regularly available. **Tasmanian Redline Coaches** (✆ **03/6336 1446**) connect with each ferry and transfer passengers to Launceston and Hobart.

**GETTING AROUND** The regional airline **Tasair** (✆ **03/6248 5088;** www.tasair.com.au) flies to some settlements in Tasmania. **Par Avion** (✆ **03/6248 5390;** www.paravion.com.au) concentrates on the state's southwest World Heritage areas and also operates wonderful sightseeing tours. A 2½-hour southwest wilderness flight, for example, costs A$176 (US$141) per person.

**Tasmanian Redline Coaches** (✆ **03/6336 1446;** www.redlinecoaches.com.au) and **Tassielink** (✆ **1300/300 520** in Australia, or 03/6272 6611; www.tigerline.com.au) operate coach service statewide. Associated with Tassielink are **Tigerline Coaches** (same phone and website as Tassielink), which offers a series of coach tours to major places of interest. **Hobart Coaches** (✆ **1800/030 620** in Australia, or 03/6234 4077) runs trips around the Hobart area.

The cheapest way to get around by coach is to buy a travel pass. The **Tassielink Explorer Pass,** which covers all Tassielink routes, comes in four categories: A 7-day pass good for travel within 15 days is A$172 (US$138); a 10-day pass for travel in 15 days is A$205 (US$164); a 14-day pass for travel in 20 days is A$237 (US$190); a 21-day pass for travel in 30 days is A$280 (US$224).

Driving a car from Devonport on the north coast to Hobart on the south coast takes less than 4 hours. From Hobart to Strahan on the west coast also takes around 4 hours, while the journey from Launceston to Hobart takes about 2 hours. The **Royal Automobile Club of Tasmania,** Murray and Patrick streets, Hobart (✆ **13 27 22** in Australia), can supply maps.

**TOUR OPERATORS** Dozens of operators run organized hiking, horse trekking, sailing, caving, fishing, bushwalking, diving, cycling, rafting, climbing, kayaking, and canoeing trips. For a full listing, see the "Outdoor Adventure" section of *Travelways,* Tourism Tasmania's publication (see "Visitor Information," above).

One of the best operators is **Tasmania Adventure Tours** (✆ **1300/654 604** in Australia, or 038/8309 2277; www.adventuretours.com.au). It offers a 3-day East Coast Explorer tour from Devonport, taking in Launceston, Freycinet National Park, and Port Arthur, before finishing in Hobart. The tour costs A$375 to A$495 (US$300–US$396) depending on accommodations. A 6-day Taste of Tasmania Tour starts in Devonport, takes in Mount Field National Park, Lake St. Clair, Strahan, Cradle Mountain,

Freycinet, and Port Arthur, and ends up in Hobart. This tour costs A$720 to A$950 (US$576–US$760). Other tours are available. Call for departure days.

**Peregrine Adventures** (✆ **03/9662 2800;** www.peregrine.net.au) runs rafting tours of the Franklin River, which carves its way through some of the most beautiful, rugged, and inaccessible wilderness in the world. Another good operator is the **Roaring 40's Ocean Kayaking Company** (✆ **1800/653 712** in Australia, or 03/6267 5000; www.roaring40skayaking.com.au). Both companies offer paddling expeditions lasting from 1 to 11 days. **Tasmanian Expeditions,** based in Launceston (✆ **1800/030 230** in Australia, or 03/6267 5000; www.tasmanianexpeditions.com.au), runs a whole range of cycling, trekking, and rafting trips around the country, some starting or finishing in Hobart.

**SUGGESTED ITINERARIES** If I were planning my first trip to Tasmania, I'd pack my walking boots, raincoat, and shorts, and head first to either **Launceston** or **Hobart,** the island's two main cities. I'd take in **Freycinet National Park** for its wonderful scenery and abundant wildlife, stop at **Port Arthur** for its beautiful setting and disturbing convict past, and head to the central highlands for a stomp around **Cradle Mountain.** If I had more time, I'd drive to **Strahan** on the far west coast to discover the southwest wilderness, take some time to go trout fishing in the central lakes, and head to the quaint coastal towns of the north.

## 2 Hobart

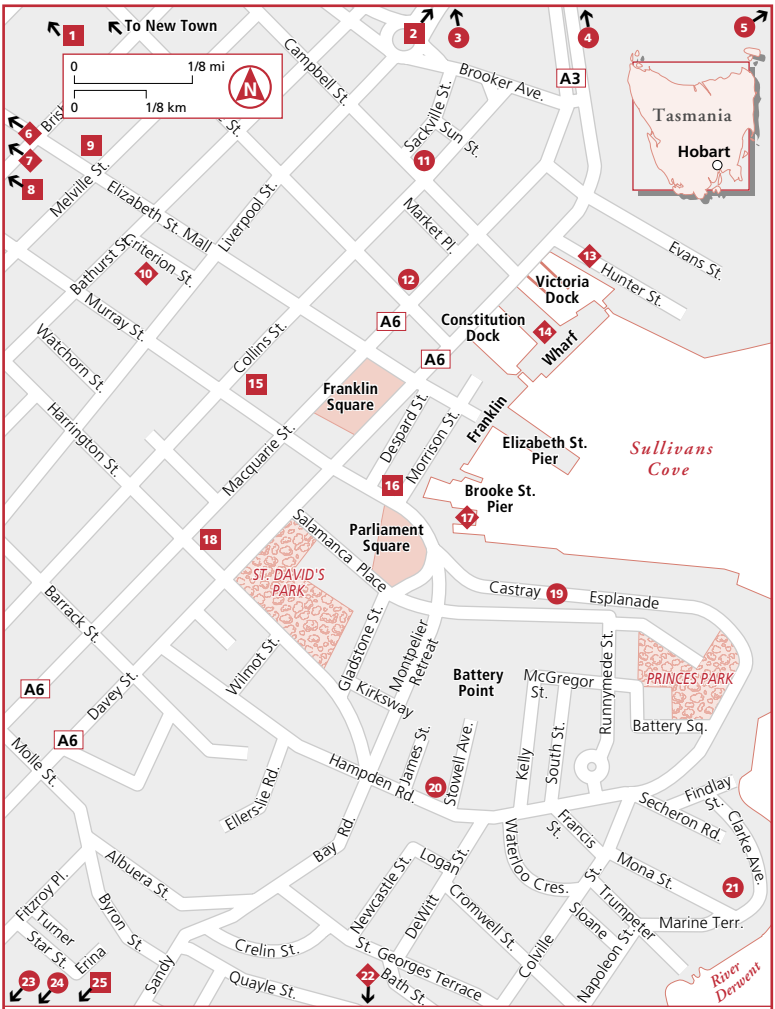
198km (123 miles) S of Launceston

Tasmania's capital (pop. 126,000), second in age only to Sydney, is an appealing place worth visiting for a couple of days. Hobart's main features are its wonderful harbor and the colonial cottages that line the narrow lanes of Battery Point. As in Sydney, Hobart's harbor is the city's focal point, attracting yachts from all over the world. Down by the waterfront, picturesque Salamanca Place bursts with galleries, pubs, cafes, and an excellent market on Saturdays. Europeans settled in Hobart in 1804, a year after Tasmania's first colony was set up at Risdon (10km/6¼ miles up the Derwent River). Hobart, the southernmost Australian state capital, is closer to the Antarctic coast than it is to Perth in Western Australia; navigators, whalers, and explorers have long regarded it as the gateway to the south.

### ESSENTIALS

**GETTING THERE** **Qantas** (✆ **13 13 13** in Australia, or 800/227-4500 in the U.S. and Canada), **Virgin Blue** (✆ **13 67 89** in Australia, or 07/3295 2296), and **Jetstar** (✆ **13 15 38** in Australia, or 03/8341 4901) carry passengers from the mainland. The trip from the airport to the city center takes about 20 minutes and costs about A$25 (US$20) by taxi. The **Airporter Bus** (✆ **0419/382 240** mobile) meets planes and delivers passengers to hotels in the city and farther afield for A$10 (US$8 ) one-way for adults and A$5 (US$4) one-way for kids.

Car- and camper-rental offices at the airport include **Hertz** (✆ 03/6237 1155), **Advance** (✆ 1800/030 118 in Australia, or 03/6248 5849; www.advancecars.com.au), **Avis** (✆ 03/6248 5424), **Budget** (✆ 1300/362 848 in Australia, or 03/6248 5333), and **Thrifty** (✆ 1800/030 730 in Australia, or 03/6234 1341). Cars cost around A$55 (US$44) for 1 day, A$50 (US$40) per day for 2 days, A$45 (US$36) per day for 4 days, and A$40 (US$32) per day for a week or more. You might find better bargains




**ACCOMMODATIONS**
Adelphia Court YHA Hotel **1**
Black Prince **9**
Central City Backpackers **15**
Customs House Hotel **16**
The Lodge on Elizabeth **5**
Macquarie Manor **18**
Wellington Lodge **2**
Woolmers Inn **25**

**DINING**
Cumquat on Criterion **10**
Drunken Admiral Restaurant **13**
Mit Zitrone **6**
The Point Revolving Restaurant **22**
Sisco's on the Pier **17**
Vanidol's Asian Cuisine **7**

**ATTRACTIONS**
Bonorong Park Wildlife Centre **5**
Cadbury Chocolate Factory **3**
Cascade Brewery & Gardens **24**
Female Factory Historic Site and Island Produce Fudge Factory **23**
Maritime Museum of Tasmania **21**
Narryna Van Diemen's Land Folk Museum **19**
Royal Tasmanian Botanical Gardens **4**
Salamanca Market **19**
Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery **13**
Theatre Royal **11**

in town with lower-priced rental companies such as **Lo-Cost Auto Rent** (✆ 1800/030 023 in Australia, or 03/6231 0550) and **Range Rent-a-Bug** (✆ 03/6231 0300).

**VISITOR INFORMATION** Information is available from the **Tasmanian Travel Centre,** 20 Davey St. (✆ **03/6230 8233;** tasbookings@tasvisinfo.com.au). It's open Monday through Friday from 8:30am to 5:15pm, Saturday and public holidays from 9am to 4pm, and Sunday from 9am to 1pm (9am–4pm Dec–Apr). You can pick up information on the state's national parks at the **Lands Information Bureau,** 134 Macquarie St. (✆ **03/6233 8011**).

**CITY LAYOUT** Hobart straddles the Derwent River on the south coast of Tasmania. **Salamanca Place** and nearby **Battery Point** abut Sullivan's Cove, home to hundreds of yachts. The row of sandstone warehouses that dominate Salamanca Place date to the city's heyday as a whaling base in the 1830s. Behind Princes Wharf, Battery Point is the city's historic district, which in colonial times was the home of sailors, fishermen, whalers, coopers, merchants, shipwrights, and master mariners. The open ocean is about 50km (31 miles) down the river, though the Derwent empties into Storm Bay, just 20km (12 miles) downstream. The central business district is on the west side of the water, with the main thoroughfares—**Campbell, Argyle, Elizabeth, Murray,** and **Harrington streets**—sloping down to the busy harbor. The Tasman Bridge and regular passenger ferries cross the Derwent River. Set back from and overlooking the city is 1,270m-tall (4,166-ft.) **Mt. Wellington.**

**GETTING AROUND** Central Hobart is very small, and most of the attractions are in easy walking distance. **Metro Tasmania** (✆ **13 22 01** or 03/6233 4232; www.metrotas.com.au) operates public buses throughout the city and suburban areas. Single tickets cost A$1.60 to A$3.70 (US$1.30–US$2.95) depending on how far you're going. **Day Rover** tickets are good between 9am and 4:30pm and after 6pm during the week and all day on weekends; they cost A$4.20 (US$3.35). A family day ticket costs A$12 (US$9.60). Purchase tickets from bus drivers. If you plan on busing about, stop at the Metro Shop, in the General Post Office building on the corner of Elizabeth and Macquarie streets, and pick up a timetable, brochures, and sightseeing information.

The **Roche-O'May ferry company** (✆ **03/6223 1914;** www.view.com.au/cartela) operates morning and afternoon tea cruises, and lunch and dinner cruises on the *Cartela,* a wooden-hulled, former steam-powered ferry built in Hobart in 1912. One-hour afternoon cruises cost A$12 (US$9.60), 2-hour afternoon cruises cost A$16 (US$13), and lunch and dinner cruises are A$24 (US$19). Call for departure times. The company also runs ferry service on the *Wanderer,* with coffee, tea, and full commentary. It stops at the Wrest Point Casino, the Royal Tasmanian Botanical Gardens, Sullivan's Cove, and the old suburb of Belle Reeve. These ferries leave Brooke Street Pier on Franklin Wharf at 10:30am, noon, 1:30, and 3pm. The 1½-hour cruise costs A$10 (US$8) for adults, A$5 (US$4) for children, and A$25 (US$20) for families.

**Tasmanian Tours & Travel Tigerline** (✆ **1300/653 633** in Australia, or 03/6272 6611) offers a range of sightseeing tours of Hobart and its surroundings.

**SPECIAL EVENTS** The **Sydney-to-Hobart Yacht Race,** starting in Sydney on December 26, fills the Constitution Dock Marina and harbor area close to overflowing with spectators and partygoers when the ships turn up in Tasmania. The race takes anywhere from 2 to 4 days, and the sailors and fans stay on to celebrate New Year's Eve. Food and wine lovers indulge themselves after the race during the 2-month-long **Hobart Summer Festival,** which starts on December 28.

## ACCOMMODATIONS YOU CAN AFFORD

Hobart has some of the best hotels, guesthouses, and B&Bs in Australia. For something different, you can stay with a Tasmanian family either in town or at a farm in the country, or arrange accommodations in one of the many boutique B&Bs throughout Tasmania. Contact **Heritage Tasmania Pty Ltd.,** P.O. Box 780, Sandy Bay, TAS 7005 (✆ **03/6233 5511;** fax 03/6233 5510). Nightly B&B rates range from about A$60 (US$48) to around A$160 (US$128) for a double. There are 20 **YHA youth hostels** in Tasmania; locations include Devonport (✆ **03/6424 5696**), Bicheno (✆ **03/6375 1293**), Coles Bay (✆ **03/6257 0115**), Mount Field National Park (✆ **03/6288 1369**), Stanley (✆ **03/6458 1266**), and Strahan (✆ **03/6471 7255**). Most have dorms as well as inexpensive double rooms. The state YHA office is at 28 Critereon St., Hobart (✆ **03/6234 9617;** www.yha.com.au).

**Adelphi Court YHA Hostel** The Adelphi is a typical clean and friendly Australian youth hostel. All dorm rooms sleep four people. There is a communal kitchen, a dining room serving breakfast, and a barbecue area. It's 3km (less than 2 miles) from the city center.

17 Stoke St., New Town (YHA Tasmania, G.P.O. Box 174, Hobart, TAS 7001). ✆ **03/6228 4829.** Fax 03/6278 2047. www.yha.com.au. 9 dorms; 16 doubles, 2 with bathroom. A$56 (US$45) per person twin/double without bathroom; A$65 (US$52) per person double with bathroom; A$20 (US$16) dorm bed. Non-YHA members pay A$3.50 (US$2.80) per person per night extra. MC, V. Free parking. Bus: 15 or 16 from Argyle St. to stop 8A, or any bus from stop E at Elizabeth St. Mall to bus stop 13. **Amenities:** Game room; tour desk; coin-op laundry; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* No phone.

**Black Prince** If you're looking for someplace centrally located and unfussy, then try the Black Prince, an American-influenced pub with a 1950s bent. All rooms come with a shower and a bathtub. Room no. 8 is the landlord's favorite because "it's nearer to the stairs so you don't have to walk too far" (presumably beneficial when you've had a few beers). Downstairs, the American-style bar Joe's Garage is popular, especially on weekends. The American-influenced restaurant serves budget-priced steaks and chicken dishes. Lunch is offered Monday through Friday, and dinner Monday through Saturday.

145 Elizabeth St., Hobart, TAS 7000. ✆ **03/6234 3501.** Fax 03/6234 3502. 10 units. A$70 (US$56) double. Rates include breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar. *In room:* TV, coffeemaker.

**Central City Backpackers** This place is typical of backpacker-type accommodations—cheap and cheerful, a little frayed around the edges, but right in the heart of things. The central shopping district is outside the door; it's only a short walk to the harbor and a 2-minute walk to the central bus terminal.

138 Collins St., Hobart, TAS 7000. ✆ **1800/811 507** in Australia, or 03/6224 2404. Fax 03/6224 2316. www.centralbackpackers.com.au. 80 units. A$56 (US$45) twin/double; A$20–A$25 (US$16–US$18) dorm bed. No credit cards. Free parking on street. **Amenities:** Bar (summer only); tour desk; coin-op laundry; Internet access; pool table; kitchen; dining room. *In room:* No phone.

**Customs House Hotel** *Value* You won't find a better value than the rooms above this historic sandstone pub overlooking the waterfront. Built in 1846, the property offers simple, colonial-style rooms, without luxuries such as TVs and telephones. Four have water views overlooking the old sailing ship the *May Queen,* which used to carry wood up the Derwent River. Other rooms look across Parliament House. Guests make the best of a shared TV room. Downstairs, a friendly public bar overlooks the water, and at the back of the building is a popular seafood restaurant known for its scallops.

1 Murray St., Hobart, TAS 7000. ✆ **03/6234 6645.** Fax 03/6223 8750. www.customshousehotel.com. 13 units, 2 with bathroom. A$75 (US$60) double without bathroom; A$80 (US$64) double with bathroom. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; 2 bars; dry cleaning; kitchenette w/fridge. *In room:* No phone.

**The Lodge on Elizabeth** ★ The Lodge on Elizabeth is in the second oldest building in Tasmania, some parts of which date to 1810. Originally a gentleman's residence, it later became the first private boys' school in Tasmania. It's well situated, a 12-minute walk from Salamanca Place, and is surrounded by restaurants. All rooms are decorated with antiques; many are quite romantic, with four-poster beds. Standard rooms have a shower, and deluxe rooms come with more antiques and a large granite bathroom with a Jacuzzi. Complimentary drinks are served in the communal living room in the evening, and a good continental breakfast buffet goes for A$12 (US$9.60).

249 Elizabeth St., Hobart, TAS 7000. ✆ **03/6231 3830.** Fax 03/6234 2566. www.thelodge.com.au. 13 units. A$110 (US$88) small double; A$140 (US$112) large double; A$160 (US$128) double with spa. Extra person A$30 (US$24). AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Tour desk; car-rental desk; coin-op laundry; dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* TV, dataport, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

**Macquarie Manor** ★★ As soon as you walk into this classic colonial-style manor, you'll know you want to stay. Macquarie Manor was built in 1875 as a doctor's surgery and residence. Extra rooms were added in 1950. Thick carpets and double-glazed windows keep the place very quiet, even though it's on the main road, 2 blocks from the central bus terminal. Rooms, which vary enormously, are comfortable and elegantly furnished. One room is suitable for people with disabilities. The staff is very friendly and will be happy to escort you around the premises in search of your favorite room. Check out the delightful dining room and the drawing room complete with old couches and a grand piano. Parking is just to the left down the side of the main building. Smoking is not permitted.

172 Macquarie St., Hobart, TAS 7000. ✆ **1800/243 044** in Australia, or 03/6224 4999. Fax 03/6224 4333. www.macmanor.com.au. 18 units (most with shower only). A$160 (US$128) double; A$190 (US$152) Heritage suite; A$210 (US$168) Macquarie suite. Extra adult A$33 (US$26), extra child A$17 (US$14). Rates include full breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Tour desk; dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms; 1 room for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* TV, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

**Wellington Lodge** ★ This charming Victorian-style town house (ca. 1885) is just a 10-minute walk (through Hobart's Rose Garden) from the main shopping area and Salamanca Place. Expect wooden floorboards, a country feel, and period antiques. Complimentary port is served every evening in the guest lounge. The airport bus will drop you off here. Smoking is not permitted.

7 Scott St., Hobart, TAS 7000. ✆ **03/6231 0614.** Fax 03/6234 1551. www.wwt.com.au/wellingtonlodge. 4 units. A$110–A$130 (US$88–US$104) double. Extra person A$30 (US$24). Rates include full breakfast. MC, V. Free parking. Bus: Any route to the Aquatic Center. Children under 11 not accepted. **Amenities:** Nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* TV, fridge, hair dryer.

**Woolmers Inn** Situated 2km (1¼ miles) south of the city, Woolmers Inn offers cozy one- or two-bedroom units with full kitchens. One unit is suitable for travelers with disabilities. Sandy Bay is Hobart's main suburb; it's halfway between the casino and the city (within walking distance of Salamanca Place) and features a "golden mile" of boutique shopping. The inn was upgraded throughout in 1999.

123–127 Sandy Bay Rd., Hobart, TAS 7000. ✆ **1800/030 780** in Australia, or 03/6223 7355. Fax 03/6223 1981. woolmersinn@bigpond.com.au. 36 units. A$121 (US$97) 1-bedroom apt; A$149 (US$119) 2-bedroom apt. Rates 10%

higher from mid-Dec to end of Jan, and cheaper in winter. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. Bus: Sandy Bay route (no number) from Elizabeth St. Mall on Elizabeth St. **Amenities:** Tour desk; babysitting; coin-op laundry; dry cleaning; 1 room for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* TV/VCR, kitchen, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

## WHERE TO DINE

Tasmania is known for its fresh seafood, including oysters, crab, crayfish, salmon, and trout. Once cheap, in recent years prices have crept up to match or even surpass those on the mainland. Generally, the food is of good quality.

**Cumquat on Criterion** ★ *Value* ASIAN/AUSTRALIAN This cafe is an excellent breakfast venue, offering everything from eggs on toast to porridge with brown sugar. On the menu for lunch and dinner you could find Thai beef curry, *laksa,* a daily risotto, and *chermoula*-marinated fish. The desserts can be great. Vegetarians, vegans, and those on a gluten-free diet are very well catered for, as are carnivores.

10 Criterion St. ✆ **03/6234 5858.** Reservations recommended. Main courses A$7.50–A$15 (US$6–US$12). No credit cards. Mon–Fri 8am–6pm.

**Drunken Admiral Restaurant** ★ SEAFOOD The Drunken Admiral, opposite the Hotel Grand Chancellor on the waterfront, is an extremely popular spot with tourists and can get raucous on busy evenings. The main attraction is its famous seafood chowder, swimming with anything that was on sale at the docks that morning. The large Yachties seafood grill is a full plate of squid, scallops, fish, mussels, and prawns, but there are plenty of simpler fish dishes on the menu, too. Otherwise splash out on Sperm Whale Sally's Shellfish Platter or perhaps Captain Nimrod's Depth Charge Platter. The salad bar spreads over a sailing dinghy and can be raided as often as you want, but it's rather uninteresting, so you'll probably be content with just one dip.

17–19 Hunter St. ✆ **03/6234 1903.** Reservations required. Main courses A$14–A$23 (US$11–US$18). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 6–10:30pm.

**Mit Zitrone** ★★ MODERN AUSTRALIAN Chef/owner Chris Jackman has earned quite a reputation in Tasmania. His twice-cooked eggs with chile-palm sugar are a huge seller. Hot smoked blue-eye cod with ginger and wok-fried greens, and chicken and mushroom sausages with wide noodles, spinach, and anchovy sauce are sensational. The informal restaurant, which is basically an old shop, has bright yellow walls and wooden floors and furniture. You can also drop in for coffee and cake.

333 Elizabeth St., North Hobart. ✆ **03/6234 8113.** Reservations recommended. Main courses A$17 (US$14). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Sat 10am–2pm; Tues–Sat 6–10pm.

**The Point Revolving Restaurant** TASMANIAN/AUSTRALIAN This revolving restaurant on the 17th floor of the Wrest Point Hotel Casino is known for its spectacular harbor and mountain views. Its specialties—prawns flambé in curry sauce and Caesar salad, and crêpes suzette—are wonderful. The service is friendly and relaxed. This place is packed on weekends.

In the Wrest Point Hotel Casino, 410 Sandy Bay Rd. ✆ **03/6225 0112.** Reservations recommended. Main courses from A$12 (US$9.60) at lunch, from A$17 (US$14) at dinner. Fixed-price 3-course menu lunch A$26 (US$21); dinner A$43 (US$34) Fri–Sat, A$34 (US$27) Sun–Thurs. AE, DC, MC, V. Daily noon–2pm and 6:30–9:30pm.

**Sisco's on the Pier** SPANISH/MEDITERRANEAN/INTERNATIONAL Sisco's has undergone a transformation in recent years from a typical Spanish eatery with roving guitar players to a more upmarket international affair. Today it's known for its paella, Moreton Bay bugs (a kind of small crayfish) with chocolate, garlic prawns with

squid-ink spaghetti, and chargrilled octopus. The restaurant is light and bright, with a large outdoor balcony.

Upper Level, Murray St. Pier. ✆ **03/6223 2059.** Reservations recommended. Main courses A$17–A$18 (US$14). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Fri noon–3pm; Mon–Sat 6pm–midnight.

**Vanidol's Asian Cuisine** ASIAN Very popular with both locals and tourists, Vanidol's serves a variety of Thai, Indonesian, and Indian dishes. Beef salad with basil, chile, and mint is very good, as are barbecue prawns served with sweet tamarind sauce. Fish cooked in a light red-curry sauce is another specialty. Smoking is not permitted between 6 and 9pm.

353 Elizabeth St., North Hobart. ✆ **03/6234 9307.** Reservations recommended. Main courses A$13–A$18 (US$10–US$14). AE, MC, V. Tues–Sun 6–around 11pm.

### WORTH A SPLURGE

**Mures Upper Deck** ★ SEAFOOD This large and bustling waterfront restaurant offers great views of bobbing yachts as well as very fine seafood caught on the owner's own fishing boats. I recommend starting with a bowl of potato soup, or the signature Mures Oysters topped with smoked salmon, sour cream, and salmon caviar. The most popular main courses are blue-eye filet Martinique—a Creole-inspired sweet fish curry with coconut cream and banana sauce—and the giant seafood platter for two. The best summer dessert is the restaurant's famous summer pudding, which almost bursts with berries. In winter, Granny Leatherwood Pudding—made of apples and Australian leatherwood honey and served with cinnamon ice cream—is worth the trip. The complex also includes **Lower Deck,** a popular self-service family restaurant where you can dine well on fish and french fries for under A$15 (US$12).

Between Victoria and Constitution Docks, Hobart. ✆ **03/6231 2121.** Reservations recommended. Main courses A$20–A$29 (US$16–US$23). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily noon–10pm.

## EXPLORING THE CITY & ENVIRONS

Simply strolling around the harbor and popping into the shops at Salamanca Place can keep you nicely occupied.

Also take a look around Battery Point, an area chock-full of colonial stone cottages. The area got its name from a battery of guns set up on the promontory in 1818 to defend the town against potential invaders (particularly the French). Today, there are plenty of tearooms, antiques shops, cozy restaurants, and atmospheric pubs interspersed between grand dwellings. One of the houses worth looking into is **Narryna Van Diemen's Land Folk Museum,** 103 Hampden Rd. (✆ **03/6234 2791**), which depicts the life of upper-class pioneers. It's open Tuesday through Friday from 10:30am to 5pm and Saturday and Sunday from 2 to 5pm (closed July). Admission is A$5 (US$4) for adults and A$2 (US$1.60) for children. Also in this area is the **Maritime Museum of Tasmania** ★, 16 Argyle St. (✆ **03/6234 1427**), one of the best museums of its type in Australia. It's open daily from 10am to 5pm, and admission is A$7 (US$5.60) for adults, A$4 (US$3.20) for children 4 to 16, and A$16 (US$13) for families.

The National Trust (✆ **03/6223 7570**) offers a 3-hour **Battery Point Heritage Walk** at 9:30am every Saturday from the wishing well in Franklin Square. It costs A$11 (US$8.80) for adults and A$3 (US$2.40) for children 6 to 16, and includes morning tea.

For magnificent views over Hobart and across a fair-size chunk of Tasmania, drive to the **Pinnacle** on top of Mt. Wellington, about 40 minutes from the city center.

Take a warm coat; the wind in this alpine area can bite. An extensive network of walking trails offers good hiking. Pick up a copy of *Mt. Wellington Day Walk Map and Notes* from the **Department of Environment Tasmap Centre,** at the Lands Building, 134 Macquarie St. (✆ **03/6233 3382**).

## THE TOP ATTRACTIONS

**Bonorong Park Wildlife Centre** *Kids* I don't think I've ever seen so many wallabies in one place—they were hopping all over. There are lots of other native animals here, too, including snakes, koalas, Tasmanian devils, and wombats. The Bush Tucker shed serves lunch, billy teas (tea brewed in a metal pot with a gum leaf thrown in), and damper (Australian-style campfire bread). Koala cuddling isn't allowed in Tasmania, but if you're around at feeding time, it's possible to stroke one—they're not as shy as you might think. Feeding times are 12:30 and 3pm daily. The park is on the side of a steep hill, so travelers in wheelchairs are likely to fare badly. Allow 1 hour.

Briggs Rd., Brighton. ✆ **03/6268 1184.** Admission A$11 (US$8.80) adults, A$6 (US$4.80) children under 15. Daily 9am–5pm. Closed Dec 25. Bus to Glenorchy from the central bus terminal in Hobart (about 10 min.), then take bus no. 125 or 126 to the park. By car, drive north on Rte. 1 to Brighton; it's about 25 min. north of Hobart and is well signposted.

**Cadbury Chocolate Factory** ★ Eat chocolates until they make you sick on this Willy Wonka–type trip. Book well ahead because the tours are very popular. Keep in mind you'll need to climb lots of stairs in the factory, where you'll see chocolate being made. You can visit on a ferry tour (details below), or go through **Tasmanian Tours & Travel Tigerline** (✆ **1300/653 633** in Australia, or 03/6272 6611), which runs half-day coach tours out of Hobart Monday through Friday from 9:30am. These cost A$35 (US$28) for adults, A$12 (US$9.60) for children, A$99 (US$79) for families.

Claremont, 16km (10 miles) north of Hobart. ✆ **1800/627 367** in Australia, or 03/6249 0333. Tours A$13 (US$10) adults, A$6.50 (US$5.20) children, A$32 (US$26) families. Tours Mon–Fri 9, 9:30, 10, 10:30, 11am, noon, 1, and 1:30pm.

**Cascade Brewery Tours** Cascade Premium is one of the best beers in the country, in my opinion. To see how this amber nectar is produced, head to Australia's oldest brewery and tag along on a fascinating 2-hour tour, which includes a stroll through the grand old Woodstock Gardens behind the factory. The tour involves lots of stairs.

Cascade Rd., South Hobart. ✆ **03/6221 8300.** Tours A$11 (US$8.80) adults, A$4.50 (US$3.60) children 5–12. Mon–Fri 9:30am and 1pm. Closed public holidays. Bus: 44, 46, or 49 (stop 18).

**Female Factory Historic Site and Island Produce Fudge Factory** ★ *Finds* This is an interesting stopover if you're visiting the Cascade Brewery or Mt. Wellington. You get not only a trip around the successful fudge-making factory, but a guided tour around the remains of the women's prison next door. The tales told here will make the hairs on your neck stand on end—like the fact that 17 out of every 20 children born within the walls of the institution died soon after birth, and that women who died were tossed into an unmarked mass grave. All the proceeds of the tour go toward preserving the prison. Allow 1½ hours.

16 Degraves St., South Hobart. ✆ **03/6223 1559.** Fax 03/6223 1556. www.femalefactory.com.au. Tours A$9 (US$7.20) adults, A$7 (US$5.60) students, A$4.50 (US$3.60) children, A$25 (US$20) families. Tours Easter Tues to Dec 24 Mon–Fri 9:30am (closed weekends and public holidays); Dec 26 to Easter Mon daily 9:30am, Mon–Fri 2pm. Bus: 43, 44, 46, or 49 from GPO to South Hobart and Cascade Rd. (stop 14).

**Royal Tasmanian Botanical Gardens** ★ Established in 1818, these gardens are known for English-style plant and tree layouts—including a great conifer collection—a

superb Japanese garden (better than some I've seen in Kyoto, Japan), and colorful seasonal blooming plants. A busy road nearby somewhat disturbs the peaceful atmosphere. A restaurant provides lunch and teas. To walk here from the city center, partly along a pleasant country lane known as Soldier's Walk, takes around 40 minutes—but it's badly signposted. (When you come to a shelter and plaque with a missing YOU-ARE-HERE marker, turn right—the gardens are walled and there's an obvious entrance gate.)

On the Queens Domain near Government House. ✆ **03/6234 6299.** Free admission to Botanical Shop and Botanical Discovery Center; conservatory A$2 (US$1.60) per person. Daily 8am–6:30pm (until 5pm in winter). Bus: 17.

**Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery** ★ Come here to find out more about Tasmania's Aboriginal heritage, its history since settlement, and the island's wildlife. Traveling art exhibitions are mounted from time to time, but always on display are the paintings of the colonial era. The art gallery has a particularly impressive collection of paintings by Tom Roberts and by several convict artists. The pride of the collection is *The Conciliation* by Benjamin Duttereau, the second-most historically significant painting in Australia, after Tom Roberts' *Shearing of the Rams,* which you can see in the National Gallery of Victoria in Melbourne. Allow 1 to 2 hours.

40 Macquarie St. ✆ **03/6211 4177.** Free admission. Daily 10am–5pm.

## ORGANIZED TOURS

You'll get a good introduction to the city on the daily **Hobart Historic Walk** (✆ **03/6225 4806**), a 2-hour leisurely stroll through historic Sullivan's Cove and Battery Point. Tours start at 10am daily from September through May and on request from June through August. They cost A$17 (US$14) for adults, free for children under 12. The tour requires a minimum of six people; group discounts are available.

Several companies run boat tours of the harbor. **Captain Fells Ferries** (✆ **03/6223 5893**) offers morning tea, lunch, afternoon, and dinner cruises. An afternoon cruise onboard a little historic ferry, for example, costs A$11 (US$8.80) for adults, A$6 (US$4.80) for children, and A$28 (US$22) for families.

The company also runs Cadbury Factory Tours, which include coach transfers, a tour of the factory, a harbor cruise, and a two-course lunch for A$35 (US$28) for adults and A$20 (US$16) for children; these leave Monday through Thursday at 9:45am. Cruises depart from Franklin Wharf behind the wooden cruise-sales booths beside Elizabeth Street Wharf at the bottom of Elizabeth Street.

The **Cruise Company** (✆ **03/6234 9294**) operates river trips along the Derwent to the Cadbury Chocolate Factory. Cruises depart Monday through Friday at 10am, returning at 2:30pm, and cost A$37 (US$30) for adults and A$18 (US$14) for children 5 to 15. The price includes admission and a guided tour of the factory. The boat leaves from Brooke Street Pier. Also of interest is the company's 2-hour Ironpot Cruise (to the lighthouse of that name at the mouth of the Derwent). The scenic tour of the river leaves Brooke Street Pier at 2pm every Saturday in summer and costs A$22 (US$18) for adults and A$5 (US$4) for children.

## THE SHOPPING SCENE

If you are in Hobart on a Saturday, don't miss the **Salamanca Market** ★★, in Salamanca Place—it's one of the best markets in Australia. Some 200 stalls offer everything from fruit and vegetables to crafts made from pottery, glass, and native woods. The market is open from 8:30am to 3pm.

Salamanca Place itself has plenty of crafts and souvenir shops that are worth exploring, though the prices reflect the fashionable area. The best bookshop in town is a

beauty; it sells a large range of new and secondhand books, many relating to Tasmania. Find the **Hobart Bookshop** at 22 Salamanca Sq. (✆ **03/6223 1803**). For great chocolate and the best licorice, head to **Darrell Lea,** Shop 36 in the Cat & Fiddle Arcade, between Collins and Liverpool streets. There are plenty of other interesting shops here, too.

Store hours are Monday through Thursday from 9am to 6pm, Friday from 9am to 9pm, and Saturday from 9am to noon (though some are open all day).

## HOBART AFTER DARK

Built in 1837, the 747-seat **Theatre Royal,** 29 Campbell St. (✆ **03/6233 2299**), is the oldest live theater in the country. It's known for its excellent acoustics and its Victorian decor. Ticket prices vary depending on the performance, but A$25 (US$20) is average.

If theater's not your thing, you may be interested in the **Hobart Historic Pub Tour** (✆ **03/6225 4806**), which traces the city's development through hotel watering holes—an important part of life in Hobart early in the 19th century. The 2-hour tour takes in four pubs; visitors enjoy a drink in each as guides give an account of the building's place in Hobart's drinking history. Tours depart Sunday through Thursday at 5pm, and cost A$35 (US$28) per person, including a drink at each pub.

Opened in 1829 as a tavern and a brothel frequented by whalers, **Knopwood's Retreat,** 39 Salamanca Place (✆ **03/6223 5808**), is still a raucous place to be on Friday and Saturday evenings, when crowds cram the historic interior and spill out onto the streets. Light lunches are popular throughout the week, and occasionally you'll find jazz or blues on the menu.

My favorite drinking hole in Hobart is **Irish Murphy's,** 21 Salamanca Place (✆ **03/6223 1119**), an atmospheric pub with stone walls and lots of dark wood. Local bands play Friday and Saturday evenings.

If you want to tempt Lady Luck, head to the **Wrest Point Casino,** in the Wrest Point Hotel, 410 Sandy Bay Rd. (✆ **03/6225 0112**), Australia's first legal gambling club. Smart, casual attire required (collared shirts for men).

## A SIDE TRIP TO MT. FIELD NATIONAL PARK ★

80km (50 miles) NW of Hobart

**Mt. Field National Park** is one of the prettiest in Tasmania. It was proclaimed a national park in 1916 to protect a plateau dominated by dolerite-capped mountains and dramatic glaciated valleys. Mt. Field West is the highest point at 1,417m (4,647 ft.), and in the central and western regions of the park in particular, there are examples of lakes and tarns formed in the Ice Age of 30,000 years ago. The most mountainous regions support alpine moorlands of cushion plants, pineapple and sword grass, *waratahs,* and giant pandani. You can get a good look at these changing environments on a 16km (10-mile) drive from the park entrance to Lake Dobson along an unpaved and often badly rutted road, which is not suitable for conventional vehicles in winter or after heavy rain.

Bennett's and rufous wallabies are common, as are wombats, barred bandicoots, Tasmanian devils, and quolls. Platypuses inhabit the lakes. Birds common to the park include black cockatoos, olive whistlers, green rosellas, honeyeaters, *currawongs,* wedge-tailed eagles, and lyrebirds, which were introduced from Victoria in the 1930s. Also here are rare native hens, yellow wattlebirds, and dusky robins.

There are many walking trails in the park, including one to Tasmania's most photographed waterfalls, the spectacular 45m (148-ft.) **Russell Falls,** near the park's entrance. The walk to the falls along a paved, wheelchair-accessible track takes 15

minutes and passes ferns and forests, with some of Tasmania's tallest trees, mighty swamp gums up to 85m (279 ft.) high.

**GETTING THERE** **Tassielink** (✆ **1300/300 520** in Australia, or 03/6272 6611; www.tigerline.com.au) offers daily service from December through March for A$35 (US$28) one-way. A day tour with the same company, leaving Monday, Wednesday, and Saturday, costs A$110 (US$88) for adults and A$75 (US$60) for kids. All fares are from Hobart. By car, take the Lyall Highway from Hobart to the Gordon River and follow the signs after the township of Westerway.

### ACCOMMODATIONS YOU CAN AFFORD

**National Park Hotel** Located 300m (984 ft.) inside the park, this typical one-story Aussie hotel has basic rooms, some with a sink. There's a TV in the lounge bar. The hotel can book horseback-riding expeditions within the park.

2366 Gordon River Rd., National Park, TAS 7140. ✆ **03/6288 1103.** 7 units, none with bathroom. A$65 (US$52) double. Rates include full breakfast. MC, V. **Amenities:** Bar; lounge; golf course nearby. *In room:* No phone.

**Russell Falls Holiday Cottages** These cottages are right at the entrance to the park, in a rural setting with rolling fields. Each is spacious and comfortable, with gas heat and an attached toilet and shower, as well as a lounge and dining room.

Lake Dobson Rd., National Park, TAS 7140. ✆ **03/6288 1198.** 4 units. A$77 (US$62) cottage for 2 people. Extra adult A$13 (US$10), extra child under 16 A$8 (US$6.40). MC, V. *In room:* TV, kitchen, fridge, iron.

## 3 Port Arthur: Discovering Tasmania's Convict Heritage ★

102km (63 miles) SE of Hobart

Port Arthur, on the Tasman Peninsula, is one of Australia's prettiest harbors. It houses the remains of Tasmania's largest penal colony—essentially Australia's version of Devil's Island. It's the state's number-one tourist destination, and you really should plan to spend at least a whole day in this incredibly picturesque, yet haunting, place.

From 1830 to 1877, Port Arthur was one of the harshest institutions of its type anywhere in the world. It was built to house the settlement's most notorious prisoners, many of whom had escaped into the bush from lesser institutions. Nearly 13,000 convicts found their way here, and nearly 2,000 died while incarcerated. A strip of land called Eaglehawk Neck connects Port Arthur to the rest of Tasmania. Guards and dogs kept watch over this narrow path, while the authorities circulated rumors that the waters around the peninsula were shark-infested. Only a few convicts ever managed to escape, and most of them either perished in the bush or were tracked down and hanged. Look out for the blowhole and other coastal formations, including Tasman's Arch, Devil's Kitchen, and the Tessellated Pavement, as you pass through Eaglehawk Neck.

### ESSENTIALS

**GETTING THERE** Port Arthur is a 1½-hour drive from Hobart on the Lyell and Arthur highways. **Tasmanian Tours & Travel Tigerline** (✆ **1300/653 633** in Australia, or 03/6272 6611; www.tigerline.com.au) runs trips from Hobart to the former penal settlement on Tuesday, Wednesday (in summer only), Thursday, Friday, and Sunday. Tours cost A$60 (US$48) for adults and A$38 (US$30) for children 4 to 16. Another option also takes in Bushmills Pioneer Settlement, a sawmill near Port Arthur with old buildings and a narrow-gauge steam railway. This tour costs A$70 (US$56) for adults and A$60 (US$48) for children 4 to 16. Tours depart from 199 Collins St. at 9am and return around 5:30pm. Both trips include a guided tour of the Port Arthur Historic Site.

## WHERE TO STAY & DINE

**Port Arthur Motor Inn** If you decide to stop over rather than drive all the way back to Hobart (remember, marsupials get killed all the time on the roads at night—and they can do a lot of damage to a rental car), this AAA-rated three-and-half-star motor inn is a good choice. The attractive rooms overlook the historic site. A range of packages are available, including a room with dinner, breakfast, and the ghost tour; or a room, 2 days' entrance to the Port Arthur Historic Site, the ghost tour, and breakfast, which both run A$109 (US$87) per person.

Port Arthur Historic Site, Arthur Hwy., Port Arthur, TAS 7182. ✆ **1800/030 747** in Australia, or 03/6250 2101. Fax 03/6250 2417. www.portarthur-inn.com.au. 35 units. A$99 (US$79) double. Extra person A$15 (US$12). Children under 12 stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. Bus: Hobart Coaches (✆ **1800/030 620** in Australia, or 03/6234 4077) from Hobart Mon–Fri. **Amenities:** Restaurant; playground; coin-op laundry. *In room:* TV, coffeemaker, iron.

## EN ROUTE TO PORT ARTHUR

On the way to Port Arthur you might want to stop off at the historic village of Richmond and at the Tasmanian Devil Park Wildlife Rescue Centre.

**Richmond** is just 26km (16 miles) northeast of Hobart and is the site of the country's oldest bridge (1823), the best-preserved convict jail in Australia (1825), and several old churches, including St. John's Church (1836), the oldest Catholic church in the country. Richmond has plenty of tearooms, crafts shops, galleries, and antiques stores.

Eighty kilometers (50 miles) from Hobart is the **Tasmanian Devil Park Wildlife Rescue Centre,** Port Arthur Highway, Taranna (✆ **03/6250 3230;** fax 03/6230 3406), which houses orphaned or injured native animals, including Tasmanian devils, quolls, kangaroos, eagles, and owls. The park is open daily from 9am to 5pm. Admission is A$12 (US$9.60) for adults, A$6 (US$4.80) for children, and A$30 (US$24) for families. Tasmanian devils are fed daily at 10, 11am, and 5pm. The adjoining World Tiger Snake Centre, a unique medical research project, contains some 1,500 highly venomous snakes.

## EXPLORING THE SITE

The **Port Arthur Historic Site** ★★ (✆ **03/6251 2310;** www.portarthur.org.au) is large and scattered, with some 30 19th-century buildings. (Most of the main ones were damaged during bushfires in 1877, shortly after the property ceased to be a penal institution.) You can tour the remains of the church, guard tower, model prison, and other buildings. It's best to tour the area with a guide, who can describe what the buildings were originally used for. Don't miss the museum in the old lunatic asylum, which has a scale model of the prison complex, as well as leg irons and chains.

The site is open daily from 9am to 5pm; admission is A$24 (US$19) for adults, A$11 (US$8.80) for children 4 to 12, and A$52 (US$42) for families. The admission price is good for 2 consecutive days and includes a walking tour and a boat cruise around the harbor, which leaves eight times daily in summer. There is also a separate cruise to the **Isle of the Dead** off the coast of Port Arthur twice a day; some 1,769 convicts and 180 free settlers were buried here, mostly in mass graves with no headstones. The cruise costs an extra A$10 (US$8) for adults, A$6.50 (US$5.20) for kids 4 to 12, and A$29 (US$23) for families.

The main feature of the visitor center is a fabulous **Interpretive Gallery,** which takes visitors through the process of sentencing in England to transportation to Van Diemen's Land. The gallery contains a courtroom, a section of a transport ship's hull, a blacksmith's shop, a lunatic asylum, and more. Allow between 3 and 4 hours to explore the site and the gallery.

## 4 Freycinet National Park ★★

206km (128 miles) NE of Hobart; 214km (133 miles) SW of Launceston

If you only have time to visit one place in Tasmania, make sure it's **Freycinet National Park.** The Freycinet Peninsula hangs down off the eastern coast of Tasmania. It's a place of craggy pink granite peaks, spectacular white beaches, wetlands, heath land, coastal dunes, and dry eucalyptus forests. This is the place to come to spot sea eagles, wallabies, seals, pods of dolphins, and humpback and southern right whales during their migration to and from the warmer waters of northern New South Wales from May through August. The township of **Coles Bay** is the main staging post, and there are many **bushwalks** in the area. The **Moulting Lagoon Game Reserve**—an important breeding ground for black swans and wild ducks—is signposted along the highway into Coles Bay from Bicheno. Some 10,000 black swans inhabit the lake, so it's unusual not to see them. Six kilometers (3¾ miles) outside town and inside the national park is the **Cape Tourville Lighthouse,** which allows extensive views north and south along the coast and across several of the small islands in the Tasman Sea.

Spectacular **Wineglass Bay** ★★, named one of the world's top 10 beaches by *Outside* magazine, is a lovely spot for a walk.

### ESSENTIALS

**GETTING THERE** There are no direct public buses from Hobart. **Tasmanian Redline Coaches** (✆ **03/6336 1446**) runs from 112 George St., Launceston, to Bicheno Monday through Thursday at 2pm and on Friday at 3:45pm, and takes less than 3 hours. **Tassielink** (✆ **1300/300 520** in Australia, or 03/6272 6611; www.tigerline.com.au) runs buses from Launceston to Bicheno on Monday, Wednesday, Friday, and Sunday at 8:30am. From Bicheno, catch a local bus run by **Bicheno Coach Services** (✆ **03/6257 0293,** or 0419/570 293 mobile) for the 35-minute trip to the park. Buses leave daily at 9am and Sunday through Friday at 3pm. Buses also meet every coach from Launceston, but you need to book in advance. **Tasmanian Tours & Travel Tigerline** (✆ **1300/653 633** in Australia, or 03/6272 6611; www.tigerline.com.au) offers a day trip to Freycinet with an optional walking trip to Wineglass Bay (see below) from Hobart on Friday and Sunday in summer only. It costs A$59 (US$47) for adults and A$40 (US$32) for children.

From Hobart it's about a 3-hour drive to the park.

**VISITOR INFORMATION** The **Visitor Information Centre** (✆ **03/6375 1333;** fax 03/6375 1533) on the Tasman Highway at Bicheno can arrange tour bookings. Otherwise, the **Tasmanian Travel Centre** in Hobart (✆ **03/6230 8383**) can supply you with maps and details. Daily admission to the park costs A$10 (US$8) per vehicle.

### WHERE TO STAY

Camping is available in the park for A$10 (US$8) a tent, though water is scarce. For inquiries, call the **Parks and Wildlife Service** (✆ **03/6257 0107**). The website www.freycinetcolesbay.com outlines a range of accommodations near the park as well as offering bus timetables and general information. A property that looks promising is **Freycinet Chalets,** 9 Esplanande E., Coles Bay, TAS 7213 (✆ **03/6257 0143;** fax: 03/6257 0320). Wooden cabins here go for between A$140 and A$180 (US$112–US$144) a night.

### WORTH A SPLURGE

**Freycinet Lodge** ★★ I can't praise this eco-friendly lodge enough. Comfortable one- and two-room cabins spread unobtrusively through the bush, connected by raised walking tracks. Each has a balcony, and the more expensive ones have a Jacuzzi. (The deluxe cabins are recently refurnished, and some have water views.) Twenty cabins have their own kitchens. The main part of the lodge houses a lounge room and a restaurant that sweeps out onto a veranda overlooking the limpid green waters of Great Oyster Bay. The lodge is right next to the white sands of Hazards Beach, and from here it's an easy stroll to the start of the Wineglass Bay walk.

Freycinet National Park, Coles Bay, TAS 7215. ✆ **03/6257 0101.** Fax 03/6257 0278. www.freycinetlodge.com.au. 60 units. A$190 (US$152) standard cabin; A$225 (US$180) cabin with Jacuzzi; A$255 (US$204) deluxe cabin with Jacuzzi. Check the website for good-deal packages. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; bar; outdoor tennis court; bike rental; activities desk; coin-op laundry; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* Kitchen (in some), fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer.

### EXPLORING THE PARK

If you have time to do only one walk, head out from Freycinet Lodge on a 30-minute uphill hike past beautiful pink granite outcrops to **Wineglass Bay Lookout** for breathtaking views. You can then head down to Wineglass Bay itself and back up again. The walk takes around 2½ hours. A longer route takes you along the length of **Hazards Beach,** where you'll find plenty of shell middens—seashell refuge heaps—left behind by the Aborigines who once lived here. This walk takes 6 hours.

**Tasmanian Expeditions** (✆ **1800/030 230** in Australia, or 03/6334 3477; fax 03/6334 3463; www.tas-ex.com) offers a 3-day trip from Launceston and back that includes 2 nights in cabins at Coles Bay. The trip includes guided walks to Wineglass Bay and Mount Amor. It costs A$620 (US$496) per person and departs year-round on Wednesday. The company also offers 6- and 12-night walking, rafting, and cycling trips.

Not to be missed is a trip aboard Freycinet Sea Charter's vessel ***Kahala*** (✆ **03/6257 0355;** fax 03/6375 1461), which offers whale-watching between June and September, bay and game fishing, dolphin-watching, diving, scenic and marine wildlife cruises, and sunset cruises. Half-day cruises cost A$60 (US$48) per person with a minimum of four adults onboard. Full-day cruises cost A$100 (US$80) per person.

## 5 Hobart to Launceston: The Heritage Highway

By the 1820s several garrison towns had been built between Launceston and Hobart, and by the middle of the 19th century convict labor had produced what was considered to be the finest highway of its time in Australia. Today, many of the towns along the route harbor magnificent examples of Georgian and Victorian architecture. It takes about 2 hours to drive between Launceston and Hobart on the Heritage Highway (known as the A1, or the Midland Hwy.), but you need 2 days to fully explore.

### ROSS ★

121km (75 miles) N of Hobart; 78km (48 miles) S of Launceston

One of Tasmania's best-preserved historic villages, picturesque Ross was established as a garrison town in 1812 on a strategically important crossing point on the Macquarie River. **Ross Bridge,** the third oldest in Australia, was built in 1836 to replace an earlier span made of logs. The bridge is decorated with Celtic symbols, animals, and faces of notable people of the time. It is lit up at night, and there are good views of it from a dirt track that runs along the river's north bank.

The town's **main crossroads** is the site of four historic buildings, humorously known as "temptation" (represented by the Man-o'-Ross Hotel), "salvation" (the Catholic church), "recreation" (the town hall), and "damnation" (the old jail). The **Ross Female Factory,** built in the early 1840s, consists of ruins, a few interpretive signs, and a model of the original site and buildings inside the original Overseer's Cottage. Admission is free. Women convicts were imprisoned here from 1847 to 1854.

The **Tasmanian Wool Centre** and tourist information center, on Church Street (✆ **03/6381 5466**), holds an exhibition detailing the growth of the region and the wool industry since settlement. It's open daily from 9am to 5pm (until 6pm Jan–Mar). Admission costs A$4 (US$3.20) for adults, A$2 (US$1.60) for children, and A$10 (US$8) for families.

### WHERE TO STAY & DINE

**Colonial Cottages of Ross** ★ These delightful historic cottages sit on the edge of the village in a rural setting complete with a small apple orchard. Apple Dumpling Cottage (ca. 1880) is a two-bedroom wooden structure, sleeping four, with sandstone fireplaces. The spacious Church Mouse Cottage (ca. 1840), set in an old Sunday school, sleeps just two. Captain Samuel's Cottage (ca. 1830), accommodates six people in three bedrooms, with two double and two single beds. Finally, Hudson Cottage (ca. 1850) sleeps four. All cottages have modern bathrooms and kitchen facilities.

12 Church St., Ross, TAS 7209. ✆ **03/6381 5354.** Fax 03/6381 5408. mjohnson@southcom.com.au. 4 units. A$138–A$156 (US$110–US$125) for 2. Extra person A$25–A$33 (US$20–US$26). MC, V. **Amenities:** TV; kitchen; laundry; tea- and coffeemaker; breakfast provisions. *In room:* TV, kitchen.

**The Ross Village Bakery and Inn** This coaching inn, built in 1832, offers homey rooms done in old English style. One room has a double bed, another a double and two singles. The third is a double, which opens onto a fourth room that has two singles (suitable as a family room). A separate lounge has a TV and free tea, coffee, sherry, and cakes. The bakery on the premises, an excellent place for lunch, serves filled baked potatoes and some of the best pies in Australia, baked in a wood-fired oven from 1860.

15 Church St., Ross, TAS 7209. ✆ **03/6381 5246.** Fax 03/6381 5360. www.rossbakery.com.au. 4 units. A$125 (US$100) double. AE, MC, V. **Amenities:** Bakery; TV lounge. *In room:* Hair dryer.

## 6 Launceston ★

198km (123 miles) N of Hobart

Tasmania's second-largest city is Australia's third oldest, after Sydney and Hobart. Situated at the head of the Tamar River, 50km (31 miles) inland from the state's north coast and surrounded by delightful undulating farmland, Launceston is a pleasant city crammed with elegant Victorian and Georgian architecture and plenty of remnants of convict days. Unfortunately, shortsighted local and state governments are gradually overseeing the chipping away of its great architectural heritage in favor of the usual parking garages and ugly concrete monoliths. However, Launceston (pop. 104,000) is still one of Australia's most beautiful cities and has plenty of delightful parks and churches. It's also the gateway to the wineries of the Tamar Valley, the highlands and alpine lakes of the north, and the stunning beaches to the east.

### ESSENTIALS

**GETTING THERE** **Qantas** (✆ **13 13 13** in Australia, or 800/227-4500 in the U.S. and Canada), **Virgin Blue** (✆ **13 67 89** in Australia, or 07/3295 2296), and **Jetstar**

(✆ **13 15 38** in Australia, or 03/8341 4901) carry passengers from Sydney and Melbourne to Launceston. The **Airport Shuttle** (✆ **0500/512 009** mobile in Australia) provides transportation between city hotels and the airport daily from 8:45am to 5pm for A$10 (US$8) each way.

**Tasmanian Redline Coaches** depart Hobart for Launceston several times daily (trip time: around 2 hr. 40 min.). The one-way fare is A$25 (US$20). Launceston is 1½ hours from Devonport if you plan to take a ferry from Melbourne across Bass Strait to Devonport. The bus ride from Devonport to Launceston costs around A$17 (US$14).

The drive from Hobart to Launceston takes just over 2 hours on Highway 1.

**VISITOR INFORMATION** The **Gateway Tasmania Travel Centre,** at the corner of St. John and Paterson streets (✆ **03/6336 3133;** fax 03/6336 3118; gateway.tas@microtech.com.au), is open Monday through Friday from 9am to 5pm, Saturday from 9am to 3pm, and Sunday and holidays from 9am to noon.

**CITY LAYOUT** The main pedestrian shopping mall, Brisbane Street, along with St. John and Charles streets on either side, forms the heart of the central area. The Victorian-Italianate Town Hall is 2 blocks north on Civic Square, and opposite the red-brick Post Office building dating from 1889. The Tamar River slips quietly past the city's northern edge and is crossed at two points by Charles Bridge and Tamar Street. City Park, to the northeast of the central business district, is a nice place for a stroll.

## ACCOMMODATIONS YOU CAN AFFORD

One of the best places for budget-conscious travelers is the upbeat and very clean, though simple, **The Devils Playground,** 16 Brisbane St., Launceston, TAS 7250 (✆ **03/6343 3119;** www.thedevilsplayground.com.au). Bunks in four- to eight-bed dorms cost A$24 to A$26 (US$19–US$21); double rooms with shared bathroom cost A$56 (US$45); and two family rooms, each with bathroom, cost A$140 (US$112).

### Hillview House

The rooms at this restored farmhouse are nothing fancy, but are quite comfortable. Each comes with a double bed and a shower. The family room has an extra single bed; it's the nicest unit and has the best views. The hotel overlooks the city, and the large veranda and colonial dining room have extensive views over the city and the Tamar River.

193 George St., Launceston, TAS 7250. ✆ **03/6331 7388.** Fax 03/6331 7388. 9 units. A$90 (US$72) double; A$105 (US$84) family room for 3. Rates include full breakfast. MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Laundry service. *In room:* TV.

### Hotel Tasmania

In the heart of town, this budget hotel offers simple rooms with modern furnishings and attached showers. Downstairs there's a saloon-style bar with a cowboy theme, which schedules live music Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday. The popular **Saloon nightclub** also kicks off late on Wednesday, and it's free for students before 11pm.

191 Charles St., Launceston, TAS 7250. ✆ **03/6331 7355.** Fax 03/6331 2414. www.saloon.com.au. 25 units. A$75 (US$60) double. Extra person A$19 (US$15). Rates include continental breakfast. AE, MC, V. Free street parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar. *In room:* TV, fridge, coffeemaker.

### Innkeepers Colonial Motor Inn ★

Those who desire tried-and-true above-standard motel lodging will feel at home at the Colonial, a place that combines old-world ambience with modern facilities. The large rooms have attractive furnishings. They're fairly standard and attract a large corporate clientele. The complex incorporates the Old Grammar School next door, with the **Quill and Cane Restaurant** operating in a

onetime schoolroom, and **Three Steps On George,** Launceston's liveliest nightspot, making use of the former boys' gym.

31 Elizabeth St., Launceston, TAS 7250. ✆ **03/6331 6588.** Fax 03/6334 2765. www.colonialinn.com.au. 63 units. A$148 (US$118) double; A$165–A$245 (US$132–US$196) suite. Extra person A$15 (US$12). Lower weekend rates. Children under 3 stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Restaurant; lounge; tour desk; limited room service; laundry service. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

**Waratah on York** ★★ The Waratah on York is a carefully renovated Victorian mansion, built in 1862 for Alexander Webster, an ironmonger by trade and mayor of Launceston in the 1860s and 1870s. The current owners have spent considerable time and energy restoring the property to its former glory. Some of the original features—pressed brass ceiling roses and a staircase with a cast-iron balustrade—remain, while others have been faithfully re-created. Six rooms come with a Jacuzzi, one with a balcony, and another with a sunroom. All have high ceilings and ornate (but nonfunctional) fireplaces. The executive rooms have four-poster beds and sweeping views of the Tamar River.

12 York St., Launceston, TAS 7250. ✆ **03/6331 2081.** Fax 03/6331 9200. www.waratahonyork.com.au. 9 units. A$172 (US$138) standard double; A$196 (US$157) double with Jacuzzi; A$230 (US$184) executive suite with Jacuzzi. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Bar; lounge; tour desk; business facilities; massage; laundry service; same-day dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* TV, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

## WORTH A SPLURGE

**Alice's Cottages & Spa Hideaways** ★★★ I highly recommend these delightful cottages: **Alice's Place,** which sleeps two, was made entirely from bits and pieces of razed historic buildings; **Ivy Cottage** is a restored Georgian house (ca. 1831). Both places are furnished with antiques and fascinating period bric-a-brac. Kitchens are fully equipped, and both units have large Jacuzzis; they share a garden. Guests come and go as they please and stay here on their own. (Check in at the reception area, 129 Balfour St.) Also available are **Alice's Hideaways,** five other cottages in a colonial Australian theme, some of which sleep four; and four cute cottages collectively known as **The Shambles.** A recent addition is **Aphrodites Delux Spa,** a large, regal setup with a formal dining room.

129 Balfour St., Launceston, TAS 7250. ✆ **03/6334 2231.** Fax 03/6334 2696. www.cottagesofthecolony.com.au. 11 units. Alice's Place A$197 (US$157) for 2; Ivy Cottage A$197 (US$157) for 2; Alice's Hideaways: Bonnie Doon, Captain Stirlings, Camelot, and French Boudoir A$197 (US$157) for 2; Shambles cottages A$160 (US$128) for 2. Aphrodites A$230 (US$184) for 2; 2-night minimum. Extra person A$55 (US$44). Rates include breakfast ingredients left in your fridge. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. *In room:* A/C, TV, kitchen.

## WHERE TO DINE

Most places to eat in Launceston don't have a fixed closing time; rather, they close when the last customer has eaten.

**Konditorei Cafe Manfred** PATISSERIE This German patisserie had to move to larger premises to keep up with demand for its sensational cakes and breads. It also added an a la carte restaurant serving up the likes of pastas and steaks. Light meals include croissants, salads, and cakes. You can eat inside or outside.

106 George St. ✆ **03/6334 2490.** Main courses A$9–A$18 (US$7.20–US$14); light meals A$4–A$5 (US$3.20–US$4). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 9am–5:30pm; Sat 8:30am–4pm.

**O'Keefe's Hotel** ASIAN/TASMANIAN This pub-based eatery earns high praise for its variety of well-prepared dishes. You can choose such delicacies as Thai curry and

*laksa;* seafood dishes such as scallops, prawns, and sushi; and plenty of pastas and grills. There's also a range of good salads.

124 George St. ✆ **03/6331 4015.** Reservations recommended. Main courses A$11–A$25 (US$8.80–US$20). AE, MC, V. Daily 11am–2am.

**Shrimps** ★ SEAFOOD Come here for the best selection of seafood in Launceston. Built in 1824 by convict labor, it has a classic Georgian exterior. Tables are small and well spaced. The best meals are off the blackboard menu, which generally includes at least eight fish dishes. Usually available are wonderful Tasmanian mussels, whitebait, Thai-style fish cakes, and freshly split oysters. Everything is very fresh and seasonal.

72 George St. (at the corner of Paterson St.). ✆ **03/6334 0584.** Reservations recommended. Main courses A$14–A$19 (US$11–US$15). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Sat noon–2pm and 6:30–10pm.

**Star Bar Cafe** ★ MEDITERRANEAN Many consider this Tasmania's best bistro. It offers a range of dishes, such as *mee goreng,* beets, and quail risotto; grilled octopus, steaks, and chicken livers; and pizzas and breads cooked in the wood-fired oven. In winter, guests congregate around a large open fire.

113 Charles St. ✆ **03/6331 9659.** Reservations recommended. Main courses A$12–A$20 (US$9.60–US$16). AE, MC, V. Mon–Wed 11am–11pm; Thurs–Sat 11am–midnight; Sun noon–10pm.

### A CAFE

**Croplines Coffee Bar** ★ *Finds* CAFE If you crave good coffee, bypass every other place in Launceston and head here. It's a bit hard to find, and you may have to ask for directions, but basically it's behind the old Brisbane Arcade. The owners are dedicated to coffee, grinding their beans on the premises daily. If coffee's not your cup of tea, then try the hot chocolate—it's the best I've tasted.

Brisbane Court, off Brisbane St. ✆ **03/6331 4023.** Coffees and teas A$1.80–A$2.60 (US$1.45–US$2.10); cakes under A$3 (US$2.40). AE, MC, V. Daily 8am–5:30pm.

### WORTH A SPLURGE

**Fee & Me Restaurant** ★★ MODERN AUSTRALIAN Perhaps the best restaurant in Launceston, Fee & Me is in a grand old mansion. The menu is structured so that diners choose a selection from five categories, each one moving from light to rich. An extensive wine list complements selections for each course. A five-course meal could go something like this: Tasmanian smoked salmon with salad, capers, and a soft poached egg; followed by chile oysters with coconut sauce and vermicelli noodles; then ricotta and goat cheese gnocchi with creamed tomato and red capsicum (bell pepper); followed by Asian-style duck on bok choy with citrus sauce; topped off with coffee and chicory soufflé. The dishes change frequently, so you never know what you might find.

Corner of Charles and Frederick sts. ✆ **03/6331 3195.** Reservations recommended. A$42 (US$34) for 3 courses; A$48 (US$38) for 4 courses; A$50 (US$40) for 5 courses. AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Sat 7–10:30pm.

## EXPLORING THE CITY & ENVIRONS

Launceston is easy to explore on foot. A must for any visitor is a stroll with **Launceston Historic Walks** ★ (✆ **03/6331 3679;** harris.m@bigpond.com), which leave from the Gateway Tasmania Travel Centre Monday through Friday at 9:45am. (Weekend walks can also be arranged.) The 1-hour walk gives a fascinating insight into Launceston's history and costs A$10 (US$8). **City Sights** (✆ **03/6336 3122**), on the corner of St. John and Paterson streets, runs city tours daily by replica tram. Tours cost A$23 (US$18) for adults and A$16 (US$13) for children under 16. **Tasmanian Tours**

**& Travel Tigerline** (✆ **1300/653 633** in Australia, or 03/6272 6611) operates a half-day coach tour of the city, plus a boat cruise, on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at 9:30am. It costs A$39 (US$31) for adults and A$23 (US$18) for children.

A must-see is **Cataract Gorge** ★, the result of violent earthquakes that rattled Tasmania some 40 million years ago. It's a wonderfully scenic area just 10 minutes from Launceston. The South Esk River flows through the gorge and collects in a small lake traversed by a striking yellow suspension bridge and the longest single-span chairlift in the world. The chairlift (✆ **03/6331 5915**) is open daily from 9am to 4:30pm (except June 23–Aug 11, when it operates Sat–Sun only), and costs A$5 (US$4) for adults and A$3 (US$2.40) for children under 16. Outdoor concerts sometimes take place on the lake bank. The hike to the Duck Reach Power Station takes about 45 minutes. Take good footwear and a raincoat. Other walks in the area are shorter and easier. The **Gorge Restaurant** (✆ **03/6331 3330**) and the kiosk next door serve meals with glorious views from the outdoor tables.

**Tamar River Cruises** (✆ **03/6334 9900**) offers lunch, afternoon, and evening buffet dinner cruises up the Tamar River from Home Point Wharf in Launceston.

**Mountain biking** is popular in this area. Contact **Tasmanian Expeditions** (✆ **1800/030 230** in Australia, or 03/6334 3477) for information on its 4- to 7-day trips along the east coast in summer. You can rent bicycles from the youth hostel at 36 Thistle St. (✆ **03/6344 9779**) for A$11 (US$8.80) per day for a touring bike or A$18 (US$14) per day for a mountain bike. (You can also rent bushwalking equipment, including boots, tents, sleeping bags, and stoves.)

The **Trevallyn State Recreation Area,** on the outskirts of Launceston off Reatta Road, is a man-made lake surrounded by a beautiful wildlife reserve with several walking tracks. There are barbecue facilities, picnic areas, and a beach.

## OTHER ATTRACTIONS

**Aquarius Roman Baths** Adorned with gold, Italian marble, and works of art, this remarkable Romanesque structure is worth visiting just for the architectural experience. Indulge in warm-, hot-, and cold-water baths; visit the steam room; or get a massage or a beauty makeover.

127 George St. ✆ **03/6331 2255.** www.romanbath.com.au. Admission (children under 17 prohibited) to Roman baths A$24 (US$19). 30-minute massage A$48 (US$38). Other packages available. Mon–Fri 8:30am–9pm; Sat–Sun 9am–6pm.

**The Old Umbrella Shop** Built in the 1860s, this unique shop is the last genuine period store in Tasmania and has been operated by the same family since the turn of the 20th century. Umbrellas spanning the last 100 years are on display, and modern "brollies" and souvenirs are for sale. Allow 15 minutes.

60 George St. ✆ **03/6331 9248.** Free admission. Mon–Fri 9am–5pm; Sat 9am–noon.

**The Penny Royal World & Gunpowder Mill** This amusement park, with its sailboat, barges, trams, and historic gunpowder mills, is large enough to occupy an entire day. Admission includes a tram ride and a trip up Cataract Gorge and the Tamar River on the paddle steamer MV *Lady Stelfox.*

Off Bridge Rd. ✆ **03/6331 6699.** Admission A$16 (US$13) adults, A$6.50 (US$5.20) children, A$35 (US$28) families of 2 adults and up to 6 children. Daily 9am–4:30pm. Closed Dec 25.

**The Queen Victoria Museum & Art Gallery** Opened in honor of Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee in 1891, this museum houses a large collection of stuffed wildlife,

including the extinct Tasmanian tiger, or thylacine. There are also temporary exhibits and historical items on display. Allow 1 hour.

2 Wellington St. ✆ **03/6323 3777.** Free admission. Daily 10am–5pm. Closed Dec 25.

## 7 Cradle Mountain & Lake St. Clair National Park ★★

85km (53 miles) S of Devonport; 175km (109 miles) NW of Hobart

The national park and World Heritage area that encompasses both Cradle Mountain and Lake St. Clair is one of the most spectacular regions in Australia and, after Hobart and Port Arthur, the most visited place in Tasmania. The 1,545m (5,068-ft.) mountain dominates the north part of the island, and the long, deep lake is to its south. Between them lie steep slopes, button grass plains, alpine forests, dozens of lakes filled with trout, and several rivers. **Mt. Ossa,** in the center of the park, is Tasmania's highest point at 1,617m (5,304 ft.). The **Overland Track** (see the box "Hiking the Overland Track," below), links Cradle Mountain with Lake St. Clair and is the best known of Australia's walking trails. Another option in the area is a visit to the **Walls of Jerusalem National Park,** a high alpine area with granite walls, small lakes, and old-growth forest.

### ESSENTIALS

**GETTING THERE** **Tassielink** (✆ **1300/300 520** in Australia, or 03/6272 6611; www.tigerline.com.au) runs buses to Cradle Mountain from Hobart, Launceston, Devonport, and Strahan. Its special summer Overland Track service drops off passengers at the beginning of the walk (Lake St. Clair) and picks them up at Cradle Mountain. From Launceston this service costs A$99 (US$79) one-way for adults and A$89 (US$71) for students. From Hobart it costs A$90 (US$72) one-way for adults and A$81 (US$65) for students. Another option is to be picked up in Launceston and dropped off in Lake St. Clair, then picked up in Cradle Mountain and driven to Hobart, for A$70 (US$56) for adults and A$63 (US$50) for students. Check the website for departure times, which change. The company also runs a day tour from Launceston, including short walks, for A$89 (US$71) for adults and A$55 (US$44) for children.

**Maxwells Cradle Mountain–Lake St. Clair Charter Bus and Taxi Service** (✆/fax **03/6492 1431**) runs buses from Devonport and Launceston to Cradle Mountain. The fare starts at A$35 (US$28). The buses also travel to other areas nearby, such as the Walls of Jerusalem, as well as Lake St. Clair. Buses also run from the Cradle Mountain campground to the start of the Overland Track.

Motorists enter the park off the Lyall Highway from Hobart, via Deloraine or Poatina from Launceston, and via Sheffield or Wilmot from Devonport. Both Cradle Mountain and Lake St. Clair are well signposted.

**VISITOR INFORMATION** The park headquarters, **Cradle Mountain Visitor Centre** (✆ **03/6492 1133;** fax 03/6492 1120; www.parks.tas.gov.au), on the northern edge of the park outside Cradle Mountain Lodge, offers the best information on walks and treks. It's open daily 8am to 5pm (6pm in summer).

### WHERE TO STAY & DINE

**Waldheim Cabins** For a real wilderness experience, head to these cabins run by the Parks and Wildlife Service, located 5km (3 miles) from Cradle Mountain Lodge. Nestled between button grass plains and temperate rainforest, they are simple and affordable and offer good access to plenty of walking tracks. Each heated cabin has single bunk beds, basic cooking utensils, crockery, cutlery, and a gas stove. Each accommodates four

## Finds Hiking the Overland Track

The best-known hiking trail in Australia is the **Overland Track** ★★, an 85km (53-mile) route between Cradle Mountain and Lake St. Clair. The trek takes 5 to 10 days and goes through high alpine plateaus, button grass plains, heathland, and rainforests, and passes glacial lakes, ice-carved crags, and waterfalls. The trek gives you a good look at the beauty of Tasmania's pristine wilderness, and although the first day is quite tough, you soon get into the rhythm. After climbing to Pelion Gap, the track gradually descends southward toward the towering myrtle forests on the shores of Lake St. Clair. There are many rewarding side trips, including the 1-day ascent of Mt. Ossa (1,617m/5,304 ft.), Tasmania's highest peak.

Several companies offer guided walks of the Overland Track October through April. For those who wish to do it solo, simple public huts (on a first-come, first-served basis) and camping areas are available. Every summer up to 200 people a day start the trek. Most trekking companies employ at least two guides who carry tents and cooking gear, while you carry your sleeping bag, lunch, and personal belongings. Wet-weather gear is essential because heavy downpours can be frequent. Make sure your boots are well broken in, to avoid blisters.

**Tasmanian Expeditions** (✆ **1800/030 230** in Australia, or 03/6334 3477; www.tas-ex.com) offers 3-day walking tours around Cradle Mountain, staying at Waldheim Cabins. The tours depart from Launceston and cost A$620 (US$496) per person, all-inclusive. Trips leave every Sunday and Wednesday between October and May, with extra trips from Christmas to the end of January. The company also offers a full 8-day trek on the Overland Track from Launceston. The price is A$1,490 (US$1,192) per person, all-inclusive; renting wet-weather gear costs A$55 (US$44) extra. These trips depart every Saturday between November and April, with extra trips from late December to the end of January. Another trip, a 6-day Cradle Mountain and Walls of Jerusalem National Park trip, includes 3 nights of wilderness camping and 3 nights in a cabin. It costs A$1,240 (US$992) and leaves every Sunday between October and mid-May. Many people have reported that this trek was the highlight of their trip to Australia.

I also recommend **Cradle Mountain Huts,** P.O. Box 1879, Launceston, TAS 7250 (✆ **03/6331 2006;** fax 03/6331 5525; www.cradlehuts.com.au). Six-day walks cost A$1,995 (US$1,596) per person; rates are all-inclusive and include transfers to and from Launceston. Children under 12 are not permitted. The huts are fully equipped, heated, and quite comfortable, with showers, a main living area, and a full kitchen. You get a good three-course meal every night. The treks leave daily between Christmas and early February, and around five times a week between November and April.

or eight people; if your party is smaller than four to eight people, however, you won't have to share with strangers. Two amenity blocks with composting toilets and showers serve all of the cabins. Generated power is provided for lighting between 6 and 11pm only. Stores and fuel can be bought at Cradle Mountain Lodge. Bring your own bed linen and toiletries. Guests can pick up keys from the National Park Visitor Centre, just inside the national park, daily between 8am and 5:30pm.

Cradle Mountain Visitor Centre, P.O. Box 20, Sheffield, TAS 7306. ✆ **03/6492 1110.** Fax 03/6492 1120. Cradle@dpiwe.tas.gov.au. 8 cabins. A$70 (US$56) cabin double. Extra adults A$25 (US$20), extra child 6–16 A$9.90 (US$7.90), children under 6 stay free. Linen A$5.50 (US$4.40) per person. MC, V. *In room:* Gas stove, cooking utensils, crockery, no phone.

## WORTH A SPLURGE

**Cradle Mountain Lodge** ★★ If you like luxury with your rainforests, then this award-winning lodge is the place for you. Cradle Mountain Lodge is marvelous. Just minutes from your bed are the giant buttresses of 1,500-year-old trees, moss forests, mountain ridges, limpid pools and lakes, and hordes of scampering marsupials. The cabins are comfortable, the food excellent, the staff friendly, and the open fireplaces well worth cuddling up in front of for a couple of days. Each modern wood cabin has a pot-bellied stove as well as an electric heater for chilly evenings, a shower, and a small kitchen. There are no telephones or TVs in the rooms—but who needs them? Spa cabins come with carpets, a Jacuzzi, and a balcony offering a variety of views. Some have a separate bedroom. Two cabins have limited facilities for travelers with disabilities. Guests have the use of the casual, comfortable main lodge where almost every room has a log fire.

G.P.O. Box 478, Sydney, NSW 2001. ✆ **13 24 69** in Australia, or 03/6492 1303. P&O Resorts: ✆ **800/225-9849** in the U.S. and Canada, 020/7805-3875 in the U.K., 1800/737 678 in Australia, or 02/9364 8900. Fax 02/9299 2477. www.cradlemountainlodge.com.au. 96 units. A$230 (US$184) Pencil Pine cabin double; A$290 (US$232) spa cabin double; A$360 (US$288) spa suite. Extra person A$58 (US$46). Children under 3 stay free in parent's room. Ask about winter packages. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Cafe; 2 bars; laundry service; rooms for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* Kitchenette, no phone.

## EXPLORING THE PARK

**Cradle Mountain Lodge** (see "Where to Stay & Dine," above) runs a daily program of guided walks, abseiling (rappelling), rock-climbing, and trout-fishing excursions for lodge guests. The park has plenty of trails that can be attempted by people equipped with directions from the staff at the park headquarters (see "Visitor Information," above). Be warned, though, that the weather changes quickly in the high country; so go prepared with wet-weather gear and always tell someone where you are headed. Of the shorter walks, the stroll to Pencil Pines and the 5km (3-mile) walk to Dove Lake are the most pleasant. Between June and October it's sometimes possible to cross-country ski in the park.

## LAKE ST. CLAIR ★

Australia's deepest natural freshwater lake is a narrow, 15km-long (9⅓-mile) waterway, enclosed within the Cradle Mountain–Lake St. Clair National Park. On the lake's southern edge is **Cynthia Bay,** site of an informative ranger station where you must register if you're attempting the Overland Track from this end, as well as a restaurant, cabin accommodations, and a backpackers' hostel operated by **Lakeside St. Clair** (✆ **03/6289 1137**). National park rangers run several tours between Boxing Day and the end of February, including spotlighting tours and guided walks around the area. Call ✆ **03/6289 1172** for details.

## 8 The West Coast

296km (184 miles) NW of Hobart; 245km (152 miles) SW of Devonport

Tasmania's west coast is wild and mountainous, with a scattering of mining and logging towns and plenty of wilderness. The pristine Franklin and Gordon rivers tumble through World Heritage areas once contested by loggers, politicians, and environmentalists, whereas the bare, poisoned hills that make up the eerily beautiful "moonscape" of Queenstown show the results of mining and industrial activity. **Strahan** ★ (pronounced *Strawn*), the only town of any size in the area, is the starting point for cruises up the Gordon River and into the rainforest.

### ESSENTIALS

**GETTING THERE** **Tassielink** (✆ **1300/300 520** in Australia, or 03/6272 6611; www.tigerline.com.au) runs coaches between Strahan and Launceston, Devonport, and Cradle Mountain every Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday; it serves Hobart on Friday and Sunday. Operating days tend to change, so check the website. The trip from Launceston costs A$47 (US$38) and takes over 8 hours. The drive from Hobart to Strahan takes about 4½ hours without stops. From Devonport, allow 3½ hours. Although the roads are good, they twist and turn and are particularly hazardous at night, when marsupial animals come out to feed. The cheapest way to travel between these places is by bus with a **Tassielink Explorer Pass.**

**VISITOR INFORMATION** **Strahan Visitors Centre,** on The Esplanade (✆ **03/6471 7622;** fax 03/6471 7533), is open daily from 10am to 6pm in autumn and winter and to 8pm in spring and summer. It has good information on local activities.

### WHERE TO STAY

One of the only reasonably priced places to stay these days in Strahan is the **Strahan Caravan & Tourist Park,** Innes Street, Strahan (P.O. Box 183, Strahan TAS 7468; ✆ **03/6471 7239;** fax 03/6471 7692; www.seasidetouristparks.com.au). Campsites cost A$18 (US$14) for two people, and well-equipped wooden cabins cost from A$70 to A$90 (US$56–US$72). There's a children's playground and barbecue facilities.

**Gordon Gateway Chalets** These modern self-contained units are on a hill with good views of the harbor and Strahan township. Each has cooking facilities, so you can save on meal costs. The two-bedroom suites have bathtubs, the studios just showers. Breakfast is provided on request for a fee. Guests have the use of a barbecue area. One unit has facilities for travelers with disabilities.

Grining St., Strahan, TAS 7468. ✆ **03/6471 7165.** Fax 03/6471 7588. www.gordongateway.com.au. 19 units. A$130 (US$104) studio; A$260 (US$208) suite. Winter discounts available. MC, V. **Amenities:** Playground; tour desk; massage; babysitting; coin-op laundry; nonsmoking rooms; 1 room for those w/limited mobility. *In room:* TV, kitchenette, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron, safe.

### CRUISING THE RIVERS & OTHER ADVENTURES

**Gordon River Cruises** (✆ **03/6471 7187**) offers a half-day trip daily at 9am, an afternoon cruise at 2pm in the first 3 weeks of January, and a full-day trip from October to the end of May. Cruises take passengers across Macquarie Harbour and up the Gordon River past historic **Sarah Island,** where convicts—working in horrendous conditions—once logged valuable Huon pine. During a stop at **Heritage Landing,** you can get a taste of the rainforest on a half-hour walk. The full-day cruise in the high season (Oct–May) includes lunch and a guided tour through the convict ruins on Sarah Island. Cruises

depart from the Main Wharf on The Esplanade, in the town center. The full-day cruises, including a meal, cost A$80 (US$64) for an internal seat, A$105 (US$84) for a window recliner, and A$175 (US$140) for a seat upstairs with the captain.

**World Heritage Cruises** (✆ **03/6471 7174;** www.worldheritagecruises.com.au) offers daily Heritage Cruises year-round, leaving Strahan Wharf at 9am and returning at 3pm, or leaving at 2pm and returning at 8pm. The company's MV *Wanderer III* stops at Sarah Island, Heritage Landing, and the salmon and trout farm at Liberty Point. Meals and drinks are available on board. The cruises cost A$65 (US$52) for adults, A$25 (US$20) for children 5 to 14 (free for children under 5), and A$165 (US$132) for families of five. It also offers a Morning Express cruise starting at 9am and returning at 1:30pm. (It doesn't stop at Sarah Island.) This cruise costs A$60 (US$48) for adults, A$22 (US$18) for children, and A$145 (US$116) for families.

**West Coast Yacht Charters** (✆ **03/6471 7422**) runs 2-day, 2-night sailing cruises for A$390 (US$312) for adults and A$185 (US$148) for children, all-inclusive. The company also offers other cruises.

Although cruises are the main attraction in the area, you can also enjoy jet-boat rides, sightseeing in a seaplane that lands on the Gordon River, helicopter flights, and four-wheel-drive tours.

## STANLEY

140km (87 miles) W of Devonport; 430km (267 miles) NW of Hobart

Among the least-known areas of Tasmania, the coastline east of Devonport can throw up some surprises. Not least of them is "The Nut," a kind of miniature Ayers Rock rising from the sea and towering above the township of Stanley. The Nut is the remains of a volcanic plug that forced its way through a crack in the earth's crust some 12 million years ago. You can walk to the top or, if you're brave, take a chairlift for A$8 (US$6.40) for adults, A$5 (US$4) for children. ***Warning:*** Don't attempt to ride the chairlift back down if you're afraid of heights—the descent is incredibly steep, and there's no getting off! A small buggy on top will take you on a tour of The Nut for A$8 (US$6.40), free for children under 10.

### ACCOMMODATIONS YOU CAN AFFORD

**The Old Cable Station** ★ Darryl Stafford, an ex-logger, and his wife, Heather, have turned the former exchange building for the telephone line from the mainland into a cozy B&B. The rooms are comfortable; two have TVs, but you'll probably spend all your time in the lounge chatting around the fire anyway. Darryl is as Aussie as you can get and will keep you entranced for hours with his stories. Seal cruises and wildlife-viewing packages are offered. The restaurant serves home-cooked dinners daily.

West Beach Rd., Stanley, TAS 7331. ✆ **03/6458 1312.** Fax. 03/6458 2009. www.users.bigpond.com/staffordseals. 4 units. A$95 (US$76) double; A$125–A$135 (US$100–US$108) suite with Jacuzzi. Rates include continental breakfast. MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant; lounge; tour desk; laundry service. *In room:* TV (in some), kitchen, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer.

### WHERE TO DINE

**Hursey Seafoods** SEAFOOD Plenty of people rate this little place as having the best seafood in Australia. Downstairs is a casual cafe, where you choose what you want from fish tanks; upstairs is a more formal restaurant. An unusual specialty is mutton bird (shearwater), an oily seabird that you either like seeing flying around or like seeing on your plate. You can't have it both ways.

2 Alexander Terrace, Stanley. ✆ **03/6458 1103.** Main courses A$10 (US$8) in cafe, A$18 (US$14) in restaurant. MC, V. Takeout/cafe daily 9am–6pm; restaurant daily 6–10pm.

# Appendix: Australia in Depth

*by Marc Llewellyn*

The land Down Under is a modern nation coming to terms with its identity. The umbilical cord with Mother England has been cut, and the nation is still trying to find its position within Asia.

One thing Australia realized early on was the importance of tourism to its economy. Millions flock here every year. You'll find Australians to be helpful and friendly, and services, tours, and food and drink to rival any in the world. Factor in the landscape, the native Australian culture, the sunshine, the animals, and some of the world's best cities, and you've got a fascinating, accessible destination full of amazing diversity and variety.

## 1 Australia's Natural World

### THE LAND OF THE NEVER-NEVER

People who have never visited Australia wonder why such a huge country has a population of just 19 million people. The truth is, Australia can barely support that many. About 90% of those 19 million people live on only 2.6% of the continent. Climatic and physical land conditions ensure that the only relatively decent rainfall occurs along a thin strip of land around Australia's coast. The vast majority of Australia is harsh Outback, characterized by saltbush plains, arid brown crags, shifting sand deserts, and salt lake country. People survive where they can in this great arid land because of one thing—the Great Artesian Basin. This saucer-shaped geological formation comprises about one-fifth of Australia's landmass, stretching over much of inland New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, and the Northern Territory. Beneath it are massive underground water supplies stored during Jurassic and Cretaceous times (some 66 million–208 million years ago), when the area was much like the Amazon basin is today. Bore holes bring water to the surface and allow sheep, cattle, and humans a respite from the dryness.

The Queensland coast is blessed with one of the greatest natural attractions in the world. The **Great Barrier Reef** stretches some 2,000km (1,240 miles) from off Gladstone in Queensland, to the Gulf of Papua, near New Guinea. It's relatively new, not more than 8,000 years old, although many fear that rising seawater, caused by global warming, will cause its demise. As it is, the non-native Crown of Thorns starfish and a bleaching process believed to be the result of excessive nutrients flowing into the sea from Australia's farming land, is already causing significant damage. The Reef is covered in chapter 7.

### AUSTRALIA'S FAUNA

**NATIVE ANIMALS** Australia's isolation from the rest of the world over millions of years has led to the evolution of forms of life found nowhere else. Probably the strangest of all is the **platypus.** This monotreme, or egg-laying marsupial, has webbed feet, a ducklike bill, and

a tail like a beaver's. It lays eggs, and the young suckle from their mother. When a specimen was first brought back to Europe, skeptical scientists insisted it was a fake—a concoction of several different animals sewn together. You will probably never see this shy, nocturnal creature in the wild, although there are a few at Sydney's Taronga Zoo.

Another strange one is the **koala.** This fluffy marsupial eats virtually indigestible gum leaves and sleeps about 20 hours a day. There's just one koala species, although those found in Victoria are substantially larger than their brethren in more northern climes. Australia is also famous for **kangaroos.** There are 45 different kinds of kangaroos and wallabies, ranging in scale from small rat-size kangaroos to the man-size red kangaroos.

The animal you're most likely to come across in your trip is the **possum,** named by Capt. James Cook after the North American "opossum," which he thought they resembled. (In fact they are from an entirely different family of the animal kingdom.) The brush-tailed possum is commonly found in suburban gardens, including those in Sydney. Then there's the **wombat.** There are four species of this bulky burrower in Australia, but the common wombat is most frequently found. You might come across the smaller hairy-nosed wombat in South Australia and Western Australia.

The **dingo,** thought by many to be a native of Australia, was in fact introduced—probably by Aborigines. They vary in color from yellow to a russet red, and are heavily persecuted by farmers. Commonly seen **birds** include the fairy penguin along the coast, black swans, parrots and cockatoos, and honeyeaters. **Tasmanian devils** can be found in (you guessed it) the island/state of Tasmania, though a virulent disease has swept through the animals and decimated the wild population.

**DANGEROUS NATIVES** **Snakes** are common throughout Australia, but you will rarely see one. The most dangerous land snake is the taipan, which hides in the grasslands in northern Australia—one bite contains enough venom to kill up to 200 sheep. If by the remotest chance you are bitten, you must immediately demobilize the limb, wrapping it quite tightly (but not tight enough to restrict the blood flow) with a cloth or bandage, and head to the nearest hospital where antivenin should be available.

There are two types of **crocodile** in Australia: the harmless freshwater croc, which grows to 3m (10 ft.); and the dangerous estuarine (or saltwater) crocodile, which reaches 5 to 7m (16–23 ft.). Freshwater crocs eat fish; estuarine crocs aren't so picky. *Never* swim in, or stand on the bank of, any river, swamp, or pool in northern Australia unless you know *for certain* it's croc-free.

**Spiders** are common all over Australia, with the funnel web spider and the redback spider being the most aggressive. Funnel webs live in holes in the ground (they spin their webs around a hole's entrance) and stand on their back legs when they're about to attack. Red-backs have a habit of resting under toilet seats and in car trunks, generally outside the main cities. Caution is a good policy.

If you go bushwalking, check your body carefully. **Ticks** are common, especially in eastern Australia, and can cause severe itching and fever. If you find one on you, dab it with methylated spirits or another noxious chemical. Wait awhile and pull it out gently with tweezers, taking care not to leave the head behind.

**Fish** to avoid are stingrays, porcupine fish, stonefish, lionfish, and puffer fish. Never touch an **octopus** if it has blue rings on it, or a cone shell, and be wary of the painful and sometimes deadly tentacles of the box **jellyfish** along the northern Queensland coast in summer. If you

happen to brush past one of these creatures, pour vinegar over the affected site immediately—local authorities leave bottles of vinegar on the beach for this purpose. Vinegar deactivates the stinging cells that haven't already affected you but doesn't affect the ones that already have.

In Sydney, you might come across "stingers" or "blue bottles" as they are also called. These long-tentacled blue jellyfish can inflict a very nasty stinging burn that can last for hours. Sometimes you'll see warning signs on patrolled beaches. The best remedy if you are severely stung is to wash the affected area with freshwater and have a very hot bath or shower.

## 2 The People Down Under

It's generally considered that more races of people live in Australia at the present time than anywhere else in the world, including North America. Heavy immigration has led to people from some 165 nations making the country their home. In general, relations between the different ethnic groups have been peaceful. Today Australia is an example of a multicultural society, despite an increasingly vocal minority that believes that Australia has come too far in welcoming people from races other than their own.

**THE ABORIGINES** When Capt. James Cook landed at Botany Bay in 1770 determined to claim the land for the British Empire, at least 300,000 Aborigines were already on the continent. Whether you believe a version of history that suggests the Aboriginal people were descendants of migrants from Indonesia to the north, or the Aboriginal belief that they have occupied Australia since the beginning of time, there is scientific evidence that people were walking the continent at least 120,000 years ago.

At the time of the white "invasion" of their lands, there were at least 600 different, largely nomadic tribal communities, each linked to their ancestral land by **sacred sites** (certain features of the land, such as hills or rock formations). They were hunter-gatherers, spending about 20 hours a week harvesting the resources of the land, rivers, and the ocean. The rest of the time was taken up by a complex social and belief system, as well as by life's practicalities, such as making utensils, weapons, and musical instruments such as didgeridoos and clapsticks.

The basis of Aboriginal spirituality rests in the **Dreamtime** stories, in which spirits created everything—land, stars, mountains, the moon, the sun, the oceans, water holes, animals, and humans. Much Aboriginal art is related to their land and the sacred sites that are home to the Dreamtime spirits. Some Aboriginal groups believe these spirits came in giant human form, while others believed they were animals or huge snakes. According to Aboriginal custom, individuals can draw on the power of the Dreamtime spirits by reenacting various stories and practicing certain ceremonies.

Aboriginal groups had encountered people from other lands before the British arrived. Dutch records from 1451 show that the Macassans, from islands now belonging to Indonesia, had a long relationship trading Dutch glass, smoking pipes, and alcohol for edible sea slugs, from Australia's northern coastal waters, which they sold to the Chinese in the Canton markets. Dutch, Portuguese, French, and Chinese vessels also encountered Australia—in fact, the Dutch fashion for pointy beards caught on through northern Australia long before the 1770 invasion.

When the British came, bringing their **diseases** with them, coastal communities were virtually wiped out by smallpox. Even

as late as the 1950s, large numbers of Aborigines in remote regions of South Australia and the Northern Territory succumbed to deadly outbreaks of influenza and measles.

Although relationships between the settlers and local Aborigines were initially peaceful, conflicts over land and food soon led to skirmishes in which Aborigines were massacred and settlers and convicts attacked—Governor Phillip was speared in the back by an Aborigine in 1790.

Within a few years, some 10,000 Aborigines and 1,000 Europeans had been killed in Queensland alone, while in Tasmania, a campaign to rid the island entirely of local Aborigines was ultimately successful, with the last full-blooded Tasmanian Aborigine dying in 1876. By the start of the 20th century, the Aboriginal people were considered a dying race. Most of those who remained lived in government-owned reserves or Church-controlled missions.

**Massacres** of Aborigines continued to go largely or wholly unpunished into the 1920s, by which time it became official government policy to remove light-skinned Aboriginal children from their families and to sterilize young Aboriginal women. Many children of the "stolen generation" were brought up in white foster homes or church refuges and never reunited with their biological families—many children with living parents were told that their parents were dead.

Today, there are some 283,000 Aborigines living in Australia, and in general a great divide still exists between them and the rest of the population. Aboriginal life expectancy is 20 years lower than that of other Australians, with overall death rates between two and four times higher. Aborigines make up the highest percentage of the country's prison population, and many Aborigines die while incarcerated.

A landmark in Aboriginal affairs occurred in 1992 when the High Court determined that Australia was not an empty land *(terra nullius)* as it had been seen officially since the British invasion. The ***Mabo* decision** resulted in the **1993 Native Title Act,** which allowed Aboriginal groups and the ethnically distinct people living in the Torres Strait islands off northern Queensland to claim government-owned land if they could prove continual association with it since 1788. The later ***Wik* decision** determined that Aborigines could make claims on government land leased to agriculturists. The federal government, led by the right-leaning Prime Minister John Howard, curtailed these rights following pressure from farming and mining interests.

Issues currently facing the Aboriginal population include harsh mandatory sentencing laws (enacted in Western Australia and the Northern Territory state governments in 1996 and 1997, respectively), which came to international attention in 2000. The Aboriginal community believes such laws specifically target them. When a 15-year-old Aboriginal boy allegedly committed suicide less than a week before he was due to be released from a Northern Territory prison in early 2000, and a 21-year-old Aboriginal youth was imprisoned for a year for stealing A$23 (US$18) worth of fruit cordial and cookies, Aboriginal people protested, activists of all colors demonstrated, and even the United Nations weighed in with criticism.

Added to this was the simmering issue of the federal government's decision not to apologize to the Aboriginal people for the "stolen generation." In March 2000, a government-sponsored report stated there was never a "stolen generation," while independent researchers believed the report underestimated how many people were personally affected.

Before the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games, a popular movement involving people of all colors and classes called for reconciliation and an apology to the

Aboriginal people. In Sydney, an estimated 250,000 people marched across the Sydney Harbour Bridge. The Liberal (read "conservative") Government refused to bow to public pressure. Despite threats of boycotts and rallies during the Olympics, the Games passed without major disturbance, and a worldwide audience watched as Aboriginal runner Cathy Freeman lit the Olympic cauldron.

**THE REST OF AUSTRALIA** "White" Australia was always used to distinguish the Anglo-Saxon population from that of the Aboriginal population. These days, though, a walk through any of the major cities would show that things have changed dramatically. About 100,000 people emigrate to Australia each year. Of these, approximately 12% were born in the U.K. or Ireland and 11% in New Zealand. More than 21% hail from China, Hong Kong, Vietnam, or the Philippines. Waves of immigration have brought in millions of people since the end of World War II. At the last census in 1996, more than a quarter of a million Australian residents were born in Italy, some 186,000 in the former Yugoslavia, 144,000 in Greece, 118,000 in Germany, and 103,000 in China. So what's the typical Australian like? Well, he's hardly Crocodile Dundee.

## 3 Australian History 101

**IN THE BEGINNING** In the beginning there was the **Dreamtime**—at least according to the Aborigines of Australia. Between then and now, perhaps, the supercontinent referred to as **Pangaea** split into two huge continents called **Laurasia** and **Gondwanaland.** Over millions of years, continental drift carried the landmasses apart. Laurasia broke up and formed North America, Europe, and most of Asia. Meanwhile, Gondwanaland divided into South America, Africa, India, Australia and New Guinea, and Antarctica. **Giant marsupials** evolved to roam the continent of Australia: Among them were a plant-eating animal that looked like a wombat the size of a rhinoceros; a giant squashed-face kangaroo standing 3m (10 ft.) high; and a flightless bird the same size as an emu, but four times heavier. The last of these giant marsupials are believed to have died out some 40,000 years ago, possibly helped towards extinction by Aborigines.

**EARLY EXPLORERS** The existence of Australia had been in the minds of Europeans since the Greek astronomer Ptolemy drew a map of the world in about A.D. 150 showing a large landmass in the south, which he believed had to be there to balance out the land in the Northern Hemisphere. He called it *Terra Australia Incognita*—the unknown southland.

Evidence suggests Portuguese ships reached Australia as early as 1536 and even charted part of its coastline. In 1606 William Jansz was sent by the Dutch East India Company to open up a new route to the Spice Islands, and to find New Guinea, which was supposed to be rich in gold. He landed on the north coast of Queensland and fought with local Aborigines. Between 1616 and 1640, many more Dutch ships made contact with Australia as they hugged the west coast of what they called "New Holland," after sailing with the *westerlies* (west winds) from the Cape of Good Hope.

In 1642, the Dutch East India Company, through the governor general of the Indies, Anthony Van Diemen, sent Abel Tasman to search out and map the great south land. During two voyages, he charted the northern Australian coastline and discovered Tasmania, which he named Van Diemen's Land.

**THE ARRIVAL OF THE BRITISH** In 1697, English pirate William Dampier

published a book about his adventures. The text mentions Shark Beach on the northwest coast of Australia as the place his pirate ship made its repairs after robbing ships on the Pacific Ocean. Sent to further explore by England's King William III, Dampier returned and found little to recommend.

Capt. James Cook turned up in 1770 and charted the east coast in his ship HMS *Endeavor.* He claimed the land for Britain and named it New South Wales, probably as a favor to Thomas Pennant, a Welsh patriot and botanist who was a friend of the *Endeavour*'s botanist, Joseph Banks. On April 29, Cook landed at Botany Bay, which he named after the discovery of scores of plants hitherto unknown to science. Turning northward, Cook passed an entrance to a possible harbor, which appeared to offer safe anchorage, and named it Port Jackson after the secretary to the admiralty, George Jackson. Back in Britain, King George III viewed Australia as a potential colony and repository of Britain's overflowing prison population, which could no longer be transported to the United States of America following the War of Independence.

The First Fleet left England in May 1787, made up of 11 store and transport ships (none of them were bigger than the passenger ferries that ply modern-day Sydney Harbour from Circular Quay to Manly) led by Arthur Phillip. Aboard were 1,480 people, including 759 convicts. Phillip's flagship, *The Supply,* reached Botany Bay in January 1788, but Phillip decided the soil was poor and the surroundings too swampy. On January 26, now celebrated as Australia Day, he settled for Port Jackson (Sydney Harbour) instead.

**SETTLING DOWN** The convicts were immediately put to work clearing land, planting crops, and constructing buildings. The early food harvests were failures, and by early 1790, the fledgling colony was facing starvation.

Phillip decided to give some convicts pardons for good behavior and service, and even grant small land parcels to those who were really industrious. In 1795, coal was discovered; in 1810 Governor Macquarie began extensive city building projects; and in 1813 the explorers Blaxland, Wentworth, and Lawson forged a passage over the Blue Mountains to the fertile plains beyond.

When gold was discovered in Victoria in 1852 and in Western Australia 12 years later, hundreds of thousands of immigrants from Europe, America, and China flooded into the country in search of their fortunes. By 1860, more than a million non-Aboriginal people were living in Australia.

The last 10,000 convicts were transported to Western Australia between 1850 and 1868, bringing the total shipped to Australia to 168,000.

**FEDERATION & THE GREAT WARS** On January 1, 1901, the six states that made up Australia proclaimed themselves to be part of one nation, and the Commonwealth of Australia was formed. In the same ceremony, the first governor general was sworn in as the representative of the queen, who remained head of state. In 1914, Australia joined the Mother Country in war. In April the following year, the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (Anzac) formed a beachhead on the peninsula of Gallipoli in Turkey. The Turkish troops had been warned, and 8 months of fighting ended with 8,587 Australian dead and more than 19,000 wounded.

Australians fought in World War II in North Africa, Greece, and the Middle East. In March 1942, Japanese aircraft bombed Broome in Western Australia and Darwin in the Northern Territory. In May 1942, Japanese midget submarines entered Sydney Harbour and torpedoed a ferry before being destroyed. Later that year, Australian volunteers fought an

incredibly brave retreat through the jungles of Papua New Guinea on the Kokoda Trail against superior Japanese forces. Australian troops fought alongside Americans in subsequent wars in Korea and Vietnam and sent military support to the Persian Gulf conflicts.

**RECENT TIMES** Following World War II, mass immigration to Australia, primarily from Europe, boosted the population. In 1974 the left-of-center Whitlam government put an end to the White Australia policy that had largely restricted black and Asian immigration since 1901. In 1986 the official umbilical cord to Britain was cut when the Australian Constitution was separated from that of its motherland. Australia had begun the march to complete independence.

In 1992 the High Court handed down the *Mabo* decision that ruled that Aborigines had a right to claim government-owned land if they could prove a continued connection with it. The following year, huge crowds filled Sydney's Circular Quay to hear that the city had won the 2000 Olympic Games.

New venues were built for the Olympics; some of these were temporary, while others are now used as arenas for professional and amateur sports. A new expressway and train link were built to connect the spruced-up airport to the city center, and Sydney welcomed thousands of international visitors to the 2-week extravaganza starting in September 2000. The Games put medal-winning Australian athletes Cathy Freeman and swimmer Ian Thorpe in the spotlight and spurred a new wave of interest and tourism in the land Down Under.

## 4 Aussie Eats & Drinks

### THE EATS

It took a long time for the average Australian to realize that there is more to food than English-style sausage and mashed potatoes, "meat and three veg," and a Sunday roast. It wasn't long ago that spaghetti was something foreigners ate, and zucchini and eggplant were considered exotic. Then came mass immigration and all sorts of foods that people had only read about in *National Geographic.*

The first big wave of Italian immigrants in the 1950s caused a national scandal. The great Aussie dream was to have a quarter-acre block of land with a Hills Hoist (a circular revolving clothesline) in the backyard. When Italians started hanging their freshly made pasta out to dry on this Aussie icon, it caused an uproar, and some clamored for the new arrivals to be shipped back. As Australia matured, southern European cuisine became increasingly popular until olive oil was sizzling in frying pans the way only lard had done previously.

In the 1980s, waves of Asian immigrants hit Australia's shores. Suddenly, everyone was cooking with woks. These days, this fusion of flavors and styles has melded into what's now commonly referred to as "Modern Australian"—a distinctive cuisine blending the spices of the East with the flavors of the West.

***Note:*** Tipping is not widely expected in Australia, but it is usual to tip around 5% to 10% or round up to the nearest A$10 (US$8) for a substantial meal in a good restaurant.

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# THE NEW TRAVELOCITY GUARANTEE

**EVERYTHING YOU BOOK WILL BE RIGHT, OR WE'LL WORK WITH OUR TRAVEL PARTNERS TO MAKE IT RIGHT, RIGHT AWAY.**

*To drive home the point,*
*we're going to use the word "right" in every single sentence.*

Let's get right to it. Right to the meat! Only Travelocity guarantees everything about your booking will be right, or we'll work with our travel partners to make it right, right away. Right on!

*The guarantee covers all but one of the items pictured to the right.*

Now, you may be thinking, "Yeah, right, I'm so sure." That's OK; you have the right to remain skeptical. That is until we mention help is always right around the corner. Call us right off the bat, knowing that our customer service reps are there for you 24/7. Righting wrongs. Left and right.

*Here's a picture taken smack dab right in the middle of Antigua, where the guarantee also covers you.*

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Now if you're guessing there are some things we can't control, like the weather, well you're right. But we can help you with most things – to get all the details in righting,* visit **travelocity.com/guarantee**.

*Sorry, spelling things right is one of the few things not covered under the guarantee.

I'd give my right arm for a guarantee like this, although I'm glad I don't have to.

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